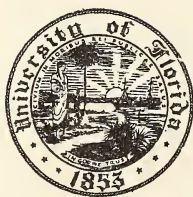




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# STAR SPANGLED VIRGIN

by DuBOSE HEYWARD

*author of PORGY and MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS*

*Decorated by Theodore Nadejen*

As no other person writing today, DuBose Heyward, with his warm humor and understanding, has caught the essential dignity of spirit of the American Negro. With PORGY and MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS he established for himself a unique position in American letters. Now with STAR SPANGLED VIRGIN he again uses fresh and original material as a basis for a novel of distinction.

The story is of Rhoda and Adam, and how they worked out the pattern of their lives when the New Deal came to the Virgin Islands. The social implications will be startling



to many—and satisfying as well—but the author keeps them subordinated by his firm technique and his dexterous byplay of wit. There are riotous moments as the Islanders present Gilbert and Sullivan, as the marriage-protest meeting gets under way, as Rhoda's puzzling assortment of children, Crystal, Treasure, Hoover, Patrick (and Ramsay MacDonald, who wasn't her child at all) confuse the issue. Mr. Heyward never bewilders us by elaborate dialogue, but tells a vigorous story in tense and exciting prose.

STAR SPANGLED VIRGIN is a story with an original theme and setting, a story which leaves the reader confident of the true direction of humanity's deepest emotions—emotions not of minorities, but common to all mankind.

## STAR SPANGLED VIRGIN

# By DuBOSE HEYWARD



## POETRY

JASBO BROWN AND SELECTED POEMS  
CAROLINE CHANSONS (*with Hervey Allen*)  
SKYLINES AND HORIZONS



## PLAYS

BRASS ANKLE  
PORGY (*with Dorothy Heyward*)  
MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS (*with Dorothy Heyward*)



## FICTION

PETER ASHLEY  
PORGY  
ANGEL  
THE HALF PINT FLASK  
MAMBA'S DAUGHTERS  
LOST MORNING  
STAR SPANGLED VIRGIN



# STAR SPANGLED VIRGIN

*by*  
DUBOSE HEYWARD



*Decorations by*  
THEODORE NADEJEN

FARRAR & RINEHART, INC.  
NEW YORK                      TORONTO

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## FOREWORD

BECAUSE this story deals with a definite locale, and because the events recounted herein occurred within the memory of many now living, it is expedient to point out, indeed to stress emphatically; that the work is one of fiction and not history. The historian is false to his trust unless events appear in exact chronological sequence. To him the time element is of paramount importance. The novelist, on the other hand, unless his book be an historical novel, avails himself of the artist's prerogative of rearranging the material for dramatic emphasis, of telescoping or extending time. He may present his incidents, not from the immutable standpoint of the fact, but merely as a background for his people. If he elects to witness and interpret events through the eyes and minds of his characters, these events are presented to the reader subject to the limitations, and even the misconceptions, of those characters.

And so while Gilbert and Sullivan, the parade of the unmarried, the largess of the Relief Administration, the resulting discontent, the return to

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## FOREWORD

sanity, and the success of the homesteading project all have their foundation in fact, we view them only as a background for the human drama of the lives of the people. Their significance, so far as we are concerned, derives from the fact that they were the forces which shaped the characters and determined the destinies of Rhoda, her man Adam, his, her, and their children, and the friends and acquaintances who composed their small, bewildered world.

It will be maintained further by the realists that the dialect employed is not that of the Virgin Islander, and before this accusation the author stands defenseless. In the first place, it would be impossible to fix upon the printed page the soft tonal quality, the syncopated rhythms, the fantastically misplaced accents which contribute primarily to its individual flavor. It is also a fact that the author belongs to that school of writing which strives to express itself in comprehensible terms. The dialect is, therefore, a conventionalized translation of a language which, never having been designed for the printed page, can continue to exist in all of its freshness and virtuosity only as an oral expression of thought. Certain minor grammatical

## FOREWORD

eccentricities have been retained in the hope that they at least suggest a distinction between the people of "The Virgins" and the Negroes of the mainland.

There remains now only the customary disclaimer: *All the characters contained herein are fictional fabrications of the author, and none is derived in whole or in part from any individual living or dead.*

DUBOSE HEYWARD.

Charleston, South Carolina

St. Croix, Virgin Islands

1937-1938





PART ONE







WHEN ADAM WORK had left home that morning, as he had hundreds of similar mornings for the day's fishing, there had been no conscious plan of escape in his mind. Had he been accused of running away he would have denied stoutly that he was the sort of man who could desert his own seed to the number of two and a wife of five years' standing. It was only that, once clear of the beach, with a steady quartering wind driving him forward into the large freedom of sea and dawn-filled sky, the idea of return had become intolerable and he had simply kept on going.

He had told himself then that later he would come about, put back to the fishing reefs, take his day's haul, and return as usual to the well-cooked meal, the capacious four-poster, and the vigilant eye of Victoria. But as the moments lengthened

into one hour and then two, he was at first surprised, then vaguely excited to find that the hand which rested upon the tiller refused to do his bidding.

Slowly surprise gave place to wonder, and a new, almost impersonal admiration for himself as he realized for the first time the extravagant daring of the thing that he was doing. Yes, he was wearied to death of the Anglican Church, "God Save the King" and the holy estate of matrimony. For five years he had tried them and he had found them wanting, and now, in his rejection of Victoria, their exemplary and shining exponent, he was rejecting them all.

His gaze lifted to the patched but well-made sail, and from that swung the orbit of the horizon, lingering here and there upon the familiar profiles of the Virgins—the American, the British—veiling themselves in blue haze against the ardor of the mounting sun. It fell and lingered longest upon a small Negro boy sprawled sleeping in the shadow of the sail, his arms thrown up over his head and his single garment, a soiled shirt, twisted to a mere string under his armpits.

Minutes passed and he sat on, one strong hand

the color of seasoned mahogany, playing idly with the tiller; then in a voice which rose to a note of triumphant conviction he addressed the object of his newly awakened admiration.

"Adam, boy," he exclaimed, "does you know what you done do? I'll be damned if you ain't runned away."

A smile parted his wide mouth and his tone changed to one of reproof. "Yes, suh, now dat I comes to think of it, you is a poor sort of thing. Victoria done took you, an' she make what she call a man out of you—an' you done runned away from she—" He searched a moment for a fitting climax to his indictment, then added on a solemn note that broke into a chuckle, "An' dere is no health in you.

"Funny," he went on, "how a man can think an' not know he's doin' it. It's gettin' restless what does it. Gettin' restless starts a man off most like thinkin'."

He remembered back then to an unaccustomed awakening early that morning—long before dawn—and to the feeling that had come to him, there in Victoria's big four-poster, that he was finished—that already, in his thirty-eighth year, she was mak-

ing an old man of him. And lying there, his truant mind had gone back to Rhoda and the old easy-come, easy-go days when they had lived together on St. Croix—before Victoria had come along with her ideas about getting on in the world, reading books, marrying and being what she called respectable. He had lain there thinking until Victoria had got him up in the early dawn, fed him, then left for the distant schoolhouse where presently she would start the wheels of education turning on his Majesty's small, black, but excessively British island of Tortola.

He had got his tackle ready as usual, and shoved his boat out until only the skeg, sunk firmly in the sand, held her. Then he had done an unaccountable thing. He had returned to the house and had stood for a long time looking down at the three children who with busy fingers were scraping their morning fungee out of three china bowls. He had picked up Ramsay MacDonald, leaving the two little girls sitting there, staring up wide-eyed at him, and had tucked him under his arm. Then he had lifted the pot of fungee from the charcoal stove, and at the door had reached his guitar from its hook and added it to his load.

For anyone who had asked him then why he was taking this extraordinary cargo on a fishing trip that should last not later than noon, he would have had no answer. A man might get hungry—he might want to sing a song—surely he would desire his son for company. That would have been all. But now with growing wonder he recognized the fact that for some days, behind his conscious thought and beneath the monotonous repetitions that made up each day's routine, destiny had been at work. He had felt it in quickened senses and in that odd excitement which had waked him suddenly and completely as he had lain beside Victoria that morning.

Briefly he contemplated this mystery, his brow furrowed and his hand tensed upon the tiller; then a ripple of muscle swept across the broad span of his shoulders and shrugged it away.

"Ain't no use to fret we head about it, son," he informed the sleeping child. "It was de time for you an' me to travel—dat's all. An' as for yo' ma—she ain't got no cause to fret even so. Ain't I done left she two of my own seed—an' ain't carry but one?"

Now that was settled. He was free and he had



been magnanimous. Well content, he turned to face the immediate prospect. He had under him his own good ship. She was a stiff little sloop, twenty-two feet long. Her rigging was sound and her sails well cut and, even if also well patched, strong. He could follow his trade of fisherman, or he could make a small living hauling sand from St. John beach to the builders on other islands where no local sand was suited to the making of concrete. He knew several boats that were moving sand, and they seemed to do well enough at it. He could even get a job doing housework—as under Victoria's tutelage he had mastered the rudiments of house cleaning and waiting on table. But this last expedient he dismissed at once. It reminded him too acutely of his recent bondage. Loudly and with some belligerence he addressed himself to his son.

“An’ what’s more, Ramsay MacDonald, Esquire—you an’ me—we is through with women. We is goin’ to live we own life, free an’ natchell—an’ there ain’t goin’ be nobody to tell we when to sit down an’ when to get up.”

He decided that he would build a small house amidships into which they could crawl at night. It

would all be very cozy and excessively male. He reverted to his last sentence and clinched it by adding indignantly, "*An' when to sit down again.*"

So engrossed had he been with his thoughts that it had not occurred to him until this moment to wonder whither this new and inexplicable impulse was taking him, and now he noted with interest that he had put some miles behind him. Dead astern he could see that Tortola had already taken to itself the blue of increasing distance which absorbs all details, and was melting, a diminishing silhouette, into the darker line of the horizon. Off the starboard quarter St. John was still showing a green tinge from its well-clad hillsides, with here and there a crescent beach or a white block of a cottage to break the dominant tone; while well away to starboard the familiar contour of St. Thomas was alternately revealed and hidden by the march of a rain squall.

His gaze narrowed and he scrutinized the squall, speculating as to whether or not it would cross his path; then his eyes swept the circle of the horizon and brought up on the vague sugar loaf of St. Croix lying dead ahead, and with good sailing less than a day and a night's run away.

Moodily he watched the bow swing up and down to the swell, dividing in its passing the silhouette into two equal parts.

"Dead ahead?" he asked himself. Then in a voice of authority made answer, "All right, make it St. Croix den—only Rhoda ain't got no cause to think I's goin' back to she. Me an' women has done said good-bye."

The mounting sun had been fretting away the narrow strip of shade that had protected the sleeping child. Now it reached the upturned face and struck with its full power upon the closed lids. Adam saw them flutter, and he called loudly, "Dat's right, son. Get up an' come here. Dis goin' be a long cruise we two mens is on, and we better get we dinner an' start out right."

All day the wind blew steady and strong, and astern of the sloop the horizon tilted imperceptibly upward, blotting out the little cays and leaving only the larger Virgins above the ocean's rim. But with the coming of night the wind fell to a fitful breeze, and the restless chopping motion of the boat gave place to an easy roll. Then, with his son cradled between his feet and covered with an old

shirt against the night damp, Adam succumbed to a delicious languor, dozing, and waking momentarily when he felt the boat luffing, then sliding off again into unconsciousness.

Once he came clear awake and saw through the light of a waning moon the double flash of the Ham Bluff beacon on the westernmost tip of St. Croix, nearer now than he would have expected. A pang of nostalgia assailed him. But it was not Victoria who came with it in a swift, warm evocation. It was Rhoda with the tang of earth and hard labor upon her, with her man's shoulders and her deep, soft breasts.

Sleepily he roused himself to resist her. Calling to mind a line from a song made by the starched and superior women of St. Thomas, he chanted derisively:

"Oh, de St. Croix women dey  
wash dereselves  
In a sardine tin."

But Rhoda would not be so easily dismissed. With that dumb patience of hers which had often exasperated him in his youth she stood there eying him.

"Dere is times aplenty when you stinks, an' you knows it," he accused her. Then as drowsiness overwhelmed his senses and his head drooped lower he muttered, "Well, anyhow, I ain't goin' to, so dat's dat."

With the coming of dawn the wind freshened and the kick of the tiller brought Adam back to full consciousness. In the growing light he could see the island emerging, filling the horizon from southeast to southwest, and between himself and its dark silhouette small white flecks that fluttered like moths against the gray of the sea. These would be the fishermen out for the morning's catch, he remembered; Thomas and Abram would be there if nothing had happened to them in these five years of his absence—and Washie and Luke.

Refreshed and excited at the prospect of meeting his old friends again he made his hasty preparations. Ramsay MacDonald, bawling a protest to an unresponsive heaven, was held over the side in one inexorable hand while another administered a Spartan scrubbing. Then they cleaned out the fungee pot between them, scraping up the cold porridge with curved fingers and stuffing it into hungry mouths until they were satisfied.

On the sloop ran, the breeze holding steady and sweet, while off the port beam the sun shouldered magnificently through hindering clouds to pick out familiar landmarks for the eager watchers.

Adam lifted his son to a seat beside him, and with a proprietary gesture directed his wondering gaze toward the rapidly approaching shore line.

"You ain't neber yet seen a city, chile; so open yo' eyes and take a look.

"Now yonder," he began, while the boy's obedient gaze followed the pointing finger to a hill-top where the early sun picked out a conspicuous ruin, "dat's Mount Welcome. Dat's what de sailors look for first thing. An' dat's an ole sugar mill on top."

"Sugar," repeated Ramsay MacDonald ecstatically, and a trickle of saliva appeared at the corner of his mouth.

"An' yonder at de bottom of dem hills, right by de water, is de city—only you can't see it good yet."

He noticed that the fleet had started back to port and was running before him under the freshening breeze. The fishing had evidently been good that morning. His gaze followed the boats wistfully to-



ward the harbor. He had imagined himself sailing in among them, surprising the men with casual greetings. They would remember him as a land-lubber working in the cane with Rhoda. He'd like to have seen their faces when he appeared at the helm of his own sloop. But now his moment of drama had been spoiled.

The mounting sun had now cleared the amphitheater of hills that encircled the town, and as he watched he saw the familiar scene emerge bathed in the clear lemon-colored light. There was the little market square tucked in between the old red fort and the row of arcaded storehouses. There was the toy bandstand and the white block of the library building. Yes, it was all just as he remembered it, and away at the western edge of town the lofty stack of the sugar central stood out against the sky.

The fishermen were rounding the fort now on their way to the market. They were shortening sail and blowing on their conch shells to apprise the prospective purchasers of their approach. The thin clear music of the conchs started Adam off on another wave of homesickness for his native island lying there warm and actual before his eyes, and



by comparison Tortola, his life there, Victoria, the children, dwindled in his consciousness until, infinitely remote, they seemed to have existed upon another continent.

And now, apparently motivated by the same inexplicable impulse that had started him off on his journey, he knew that he would not continue to the breakwater and disembark in town, but head westward along the coast.

Unquestioning, he set his course, skirting the shore as closely as he dared, smelling in warm, errant puffs the exhalations from the cane fields that tipped upward from the water's edge to the line of barrier hills, feasting his eyes on the familiar contours, the estate villages tucked into their folds. No, the town was no place to raise a son. He'd start him out on the land as he had been started—Martha's Haven, maybe, where he had lived with Rhoda. They had a good beach for the boat, and there would be work to be had in the fields as well.

He thought of Rhoda again—seeing her just as he had left her, staying on in the same house, caring for their two children, permanent, immutable, like a hill or a mahogany tree that had got

its growth. He'd go to see her soon, but not to stay. And her two daughters. Strange how he thought of them as definitely hers—not at all with the feeling of mutual ownership that he had had with the other children—his and Victoria's. Crystal would be seventeen now, and Treasure fifteen—and with a shock came the tardy realization that they might have already taken their men, that in their maturity they would be strangers starting over with him on equal terms.

Well, he had Ramsay MacDonald to show for his five years' absence, and for all of Rhoda's



strength and independence she had never given him a son. He liked that idea and the feeling of importance that it would give him when the proper time should arrive for him to make his presence known.

The changing pattern of field and hill became poignantly familiar, and Adam recognized the small reef-bound bay of Martha's Haven. He jibed expertly, mounted the broad back of a comber, and raced the sloop for the beach.

Here again was drama and again Adam deplored the lack of an audience, for the beach lay before him silent and deserted. But the problems of navigation narrowed his world to a confusion of reefs and tumbling waters, and he had no time for idle speculation. He had risen to his feet, and stood balancing easily, bent slightly forward with one hand on the tiller and his eyes squinting into a welter of sunstruck foam. His body was an incongruously assembled but beautifully functioning mechanism. The torso had obviously been designed for a larger man. The legs were short, slightly bandy, and enormously muscular. Arms that hung almost to his knees gave him the reach and power of a gorilla. His face, large, quite black,

with strong, mobile features, presented to the world a look of disarming candor behind which his thoughts moved in complete privacy. His head was well shaped but too large, and the ears, set flat to the head, were too small, too perfectly formed. But had there been a watcher on the beach he would have been conscious of no incongruity. Whether sailing or swinging a machete in a cane field, Adam in action became instantly a harmonious whole, at one with the sea or the land.

His fingers resting upon the tiller were like those of a doctor upon the wrist of a patient. He eased off almost imperceptibly and missed a reef by inches, then the comber hurled him forward, bursting into a screen of foam as it flung the sloop high on the shingle. Adam leaped out and as the following wave eased the weight he dragged the boat above high-water mark and stamped the anchor firmly into the beach.

From the sheltered cove in which Adam had landed the ground ascended steeply to a lofty hill. Upon the summit of this eminence, and commanding a sweeping view of field and sea, stood one of the massive ruined windmills which dot the island, and remain enduring monuments to the

days when St. Croix was a name known in the sugar and rum markets of the world.

Finding the ruin deserted, the voyager established himself in the great tower, noting with satisfaction that, where the timbers had rotted out leaving holes in the masonry, several colonies of bees had made their hives, giving promise of an abundance of honey for the taking.

He tramped to the nearest country shop and with a few British coins which he had in his pocket bargained for bread and a package of smoked herring. Then at the approach of dusk, when the bees had settled, he smoked out a hive and sliced off a section of dripping comb.

There was one important matter that must be disposed of before the swift fall of the tropic night. In common with all Virgin Islanders, Adam believed that if dark caught him with his head uncovered, and he was touched by the deadly dew-damp, sickness and ill fortune would dog his footsteps. And so, leaving Ramsay MacDonald engrossed with a blob of golden honeycomb, he ran back to the beach and unrove the jib for a cover.

When he returned, day had burned out of the heavens, swift as a prairie fire. One moment it

had been licking the western horizon with tongues of flame and the next it was gone utterly, while stars swarmed out into the smoky void. In the faint, cool light the travelers fed to repletion; then, drawing the jib over them, they stretched themselves upon the good warm earth for their first night ashore.

Far overhead the roofless tower framed a circle of stars—nearer and warmer, Adam thought, than those he had watched on Tortola while Victoria had identified them conscientiously in her *Guide to Astronomy*. Through the wide empty windows a breeze—soft, earthy, and singularly lulling—came and went rhythmically, as though the island were breathing in its sleep.

It was good to be at home again. Or, he wondered, as the advance of sleep touched everything with its spell of unreality, had he really ever left St. Croix? Had Victoria, the children, been creatures of a dream? Then in a clairvoyant moment he saw the answer. God had sent him to Tortola to fetch home a son. Here on St. Croix Rhoda had been a good mate. She had given him two fine gal chillen, but she couldn't make a man-child. God knew that, so He had lent him Victoria. Now, her



purpose fulfilled, she had been turned in so that He could put her to some other use. Under the old jib his hand moved over the firm warm limbs of his son, coming to rest on the boy's chest, where it rose and fell rhythmically, responsive to the ebb and flood of the living breath. Yes, he was his boy, and it had all come out just as God in His wisdom had planned it. Victoria—himself—what had they been anyway? Nothing, until God took them in hand to work a miracle.

At peace with his conscience, Adam settled himself well down under the covers and fell asleep.

The next morning after breakfast, with Ramsay MacDonald penned safely in the old tower, Adam set forth to discover the lay of the land. Yesterday, with the necessity of finding shelter, he had given only a casual glance about him, and it had looked much as he remembered it. But now, gazing attentively down from his lofty perch, he became aware of a strangeness in the landscape, an unfamiliar bareness on the descending slopes, and in every direction an air of desertion. He could see now that the belt of sugar cane which lay along the coastal plain and which had given him the familiar sense



of fatness in the land was a delusion; that back of that narrow strip as far as he could see in every direction the fields had been given over to grass.

He closed his eyes for a moment to remember it as it had been. The long line of men and women working side by side, their machetes flashing in the sun as they cut their way slowly across a field, the low jungle of green going down before them, and their talk and laughter rising above the steady swish of the knives; the great bullock carts groaning along the roads, while the overseers and superintendents loped their small horses from one task to another.

He opened his eyes and looked about him. He was still too puzzled to be alarmed. He noticed here and there small herds of cattle drifting across the uniform green, and fences, their posts still bright and unweathered, climbing hills and dropping from view into shallow valleys.

Still mystified and with a sense of foreboding heavy upon him, Adam set off for the fold in the hills where he would find the village of Martha's Haven, and old friends who could enlighten him.

His way led past the great house of the estate, and as he approached the turn in the road that

would bring the imposing structure into view his pace quickened. That at least would be the same, and Mr. Fred, for whom he had worked many years, would remember him and welcome him home.

He rounded the last turn and stopped in his tracks. The mansion stood before him. The roof had fallen in and the windows were gaping holes in the rock walls. A thorny growth of acacia rose close about it. Already several tibet trees had thrust themselves through the tiles of the terrace and flecked the ruin with their sparse shade. Adam hated tibet trees. They were always quick to claim a ruin, and wind blowing through their long seed pods gave off a mournful monotonous sound. "Women's Tongues" they called them on the islands because they were never quiet.

A small dusty motor swung into view from the direction of the stables, bore rapidly down upon him and came to a sudden stop. For a moment the white man who sat at the wheel and the Negro stared into each other's faces. Then the Negro said, "I's Adam, Mr. Fred. Don't you remember me?"

"Yes," the white man said heavily, "I remem-

ber you. You were a good boy. Where have you been?"

"I been livin' on Tortola, suh," he answered shakily, for the change in his old employer was more disturbing than anything else that he had seen that morning, and he looked years older. Under the battered sun helmet his eyes were heavy-lidded and there was no laughter in them.

"Tortola!" Mr. Fred exclaimed. "Well, why in hell didn't you stay there?"

"I—I wanted to come home," Adam apologized; then to his surprise found himself adding, "I wanted to see how Rhoda was gettin' on. Can't you put me to work, Mr. Fred?"

The white man laughed shortly and bitterly. "Look about you," he said. "You remember Martha's Haven when it was the finest estate on the north coast. What do you see now? Does that look like going to work?"

Adam's eyes swept the vacant landscape, and to his ears from the crumbling terrace came the incessant, mocking rattle of the Women's Tongues.

Without waiting for an answer, his old employer hurried on: "You've been gone about five years, haven't you? Well, that's a long time under the

Stars and Stripes. Things happen fast in the States. We're Americans now. The bottom was falling out when you went away, but you wouldn't have noticed it. Ever since prohibition closed down our rum distilleries we have been losing money on cane, what with Cuba and Puerto Rico coming in strong with sugar and the government soaking us with a heavy export tax. But you wouldn't have known that, I suppose. We still kept on planting and carrying our labor."

He took off his helmet and drew a sleeve across his forehead, clearing it of an accumulation of sweat and dust, then with the old hat he pointed toward the ruin that lay white and silent under the April sun. "The hurricane of 'twenty-nine did that for us," he said wearily. "We've taken blows before and rebuilt, and kept going, but this time the States had a new one for us. It was called a depression. Ever hear of a depression, Adam?" he queried.

Adam shook his head in negation.

"It's a new way of spelling starvation," Mr. Fred informed him. "Raw sugar dropped to almost nothing, and we were finished. Most of us left our houses where the hurricane had dropped them

and moved to town. A few of the die-hards still plant a little cane but the majority has put in cattle. There'll be a small living in it, I suppose. But it doesn't employ any labor. That's the trouble. Our Negroes are practically starving and we can't do anything about it."

After a moment of silence Adam asked, "But what I goin' do, Mr. Fred? I got to live!"

Now for the first time his old friend gave him an encouraging smile. "That's the point, Adam. We've all got to keep on living. I can't give you any work, and I haven't any money; but if you want to move into the village I won't charge you any rent, and I'll look about in town and see if I can find you something to do." He extended his hand over the door of the battered old car. "You've always been a good boy, Adam," he said, "and I'm glad to have you back at Martha's Haven. Make yourself at home."

Adam took the proffered hand and accepted the offer with thanks. Then he asked, "Ain't there no good news at all, boss? Ain't there nothin' ahead?"

Mr. Fred stepped on the starter, and as the machine moved forward, said over his shoulder,

"Well, they've just elected a new president up in the States, who says he's going to make the world over—but God knows! And as for me—well, I'll take a lot of showing."

The next few days were spent by Adam in making as complete a survey as possible of the conditions that existed on the island, and in estimating his chances for a future livelihood. In the village he found that Mr. Fred's pessimistic utterances had been no exaggeration, and that the people were actually existing in a state of semistarvation. As is usually the case in a one-crop country, there had been very little gardening, and even the planting of patches of bananas, always the mainstay in the other islands, had been neglected. From the beginning of memory it had always been cane. Some had rented patches from the landlords and tenant-farmed, but most had been day laborers. A good laborer had earned as much as seventy-five dollars in the course of a year, and with that he purchased corn meal and salt fish in abundance to keep the fungee pot going, his simple clothing—even, in the old days, his measure of rum. The thrifty had kept a few fowls, a pig or two. For



high festival there would have been a barbecued kid.

Life then had been a free, gay and casual matter. You didn't marry, you lived with a woman as he had with Rhoda, and you were equally independent. When the States had purchased the island and the navy had taken charge they had passed a new law. If there was a child you went with the woman before the judge. He listened to what you had to say, then he would fix the amount for you to contribute toward the child's support. If you defaulted those payments the woman could jail you—and she often did. It was a good system and it worked. It was the established custom for the country Negroes. Sometimes a couple would get superior and have a marriage. But almost always these had ended up in a quarrel. Adam knew men who had children in several houses in the village, and they would make themselves at home first in one and then another. The woman was always the head of the household and her word was law. If the man didn't like it he could travel—and the judge would see that he remembered to send back support for his child. Rhoda, Adam remembered with pride, had never had to take him



to the judge. Both worked. She had always rented and planted her own crop and he had worked, sweating, side by side with her in the steaming field. But she had always told him that when he was ready to travel he could go. She wouldn't jail any man to take care of *her* children.

Then one day Victoria had come along. She had been teaching school on Tortola and was vacationing with friends in town. Thinking back, Adam could not remember just how it had happened, but he had presently found himself sweating in a boiled shirt and black coat, standing up before an Anglican minister and making the answers that Victoria had taught him the night before out of a little white book with a gold cross on the cover.

And that had been only five years ago. Adam could not believe that so many changes had taken place in so short a time. It had now been several years since the cane had started to give way before the advance of cattle raising. A few of his old friends still made an occasional dollar on the estates, tending stock, keeping up fences—but in most of the houses in the village there was stark want.

The old Danish custom of free Saturday had been revived. Starting early in the morning the whole countryside would move on the town and form long queues before the stores. Then at a given hour the merchants would commence to hand out a few cents to each. All day the hungry folk would move from one line to another, and by night the head of each household might have collected as much as a dollar with which to provide for the ensuing week. Most of the men were as insolvent as the women, and collections for maintenance of their children could not be enforced.

It was Mr. Chris, the old Danish keeper of the little country store near Martha's Haven, who reminded Adam of the weekly distribution of alms, and suggested that he take advantage of the opportunity of getting even this slender support for himself and the boy. Then he elaborated on the information which Mr. Fred had given him that first day of his return to the island.

They couldn't blame it all on America, he told Adam impartially. St. Croix had been going down hill for fifty years; only the Danes were wise enough to sell out before everything hit bottom. They were well rid of the islands and they knew it.

They had sold Uncle Sam one great big poorhouse, just as President Hoover had said when he came by one day to take a look at his recent purchase.



It was in the free Saturday queue that Adam got his first glimpse of Rhoda. She must have made an early start, for she was near the head of the line when the distribution of alms commenced. At the sight of her a great diffidence fell upon him, and he drew back into a doorway where he could observe her without himself being discovered. Then, watching, he became aware of an indefin-

able change in the woman with whom he had lived. He tried to put his finger on it, and failed. Physically she was much as she had been. Standing half a head taller than any other woman in the line, with a breadth of shoulder that matched his own, she still gave an impression of strength that would be equal to any demand that might be put upon it. She still carried her body with the erect, unstudied grace common to the women of the islands; a carriage developed through centuries of swinging along country roads with enormous loads balanced upon their heads. But what he sensed dimly in her now was a new hardness, almost a truculence, as she elbowed her way forward when the distribution commenced. In the old days what he had most admired was her generous giving of herself to the demands of any weaker friend. It had seemed to him always, so sure was she of her inexhaustible vitality, that she could spend it laughingly on anyone and have a superabundance left for her own incessant labors.

As this difference became more clear in his mind, for the first time the idea came to him that his own defection had not been altogether admirable. She had been so emphatic in denying that

either of them had been bound by an obligation to the other that, without shame, he had left her to care alone for the children. Hard times had come and he had not been there to help. He could see now how she might have felt—how it might affect her attitude when he had summoned sufficient courage to present himself.

After Adam had seen Rhoda in town he could not stop thinking about her, wondering how she would take his coming back to St. Croix, and fearing that new hard quality in her which he had felt even watching from a distance. But several factors influenced him toward an early determination to find out how things stood.

First, there was Ramsay MacDonald, who was in a state of open rebellion at being immured alone in the old windmill while his father went abroad. He needed a woman's care, and Adam was nursing the secret hope that he might be in some way insinuated beneath Rhoda's protecting wing. Then he wanted to see his two girls. He had heard in the village that they were still living at home and that they were fine, upstanding females. And lastly, he was humiliatingly conscious of the fact that he was responding to the old pull of Rhoda her-

self. He wanted to see her—to feel again the tide of her irresistible vitality rising about him, possessing him as it used to do, until he would seem to swing along with it almost without his own volition.

Realizing that strategy would be needed, Adam put much thought into his plan of campaign, and the following evening just at dusk he approached the cabin. He carried in one hand a string of fish which he had caught that morning, and in the other his guitar.

When he approached the open door he heard from within the slow shuffle of feet, and Rhoda's voice singing softly and absent-mindedly fragmentary snatches of an old St. Croix ballad. It was so familiar, so reassuring, that his heart contracted, and he had to restrain himself from stepping over the threshold. He reached within, placed the fish and the instrument on the floor. Then he rapped smartly and retired to the shelter of a clump of bushes to watch. She would recognize the guitar, he knew. They had sat often on that doorstep and sung together in the dusk to its accompaniment. The guitar would be a symbol of



his return—the fish a peace offering and a promise for the future.

Minutes passed and she made no sign. Then as he was about to step boldly forward she appeared for a moment in the door, bent down and placed the instrument on the ground, and lay the string of fish beside it.

Well, that was her answer, and it was plain enough. In a mood of complete dejection he had started forward to retrieve his discarded token when a long, dark arm was extended and withdrew the fish, leaving only the rejected guitar to transmit its message of dismissal.

He was quick to see the fairness of that. The food was taken as payment against a past due account, but she was promising nothing for the future. He went forward then and got his instrument, not looking in the door or making any further move. But, just as he was turning away, the force of old habit took him and he settled himself on the doorstep and plucked a soft chord.

Behind him the shuffling feet stopped. In the deep quiet he fancied he could hear the breathing of sleeping children. He started singing gently:



“Doctor bird is a pretty bird  
Sittin’ down in his golden chair,  
Combin’ out all his curly hair.  
When he’ll dead he don’t know.  
When he’ll dead he don’t know.  
When he’ll dead he don’t know.  
When he’s dead he jus’ stinks on forgotten.  
Dat’s de time he *will* know.”

Adam had not heard Rhoda approach, but he felt her now, a warm glow close beside him in the thickening dusk. He slid his eyes sideways from his guitar and saw dimly a large, earth-stained foot, and rising from it to the shadow of a high-tucked skirt a shapely but massively sculptured leg.

Without looking up, he brushed the strings softly and drifted into the second verse:

“Goin’ down to Palema  
To work for money for you an’ I.  
When I come back I remember you.  
When you’ll dead you don’t know.”

He hesitated, hoping that she would join him in the chorus, but there was only a silence, so he

sang on, playing up the haunting loneliness in the tune and stressing the lines with their cynical allusion to death.

“When you’ll dead you don’t know.  
When you’ll dead you don’t know.  
When you’s dead you jus’ stinks on forgotten,  
Dat’s de time you *will* know.”

Deeply stirred by his own performance, he sat waiting, hoping. He wanted Rhoda then as much as he ever had in his life—her propinquity and that faculty of hers of infusing darkness around her with her own warm silence were more than he could bear. He closed the distance between them, and slid an arm about the solidly planted leg. Then he pressed his cheek against it and waited for a sign.

But there was no answer, not the flicker of the smallest nerve or muscle, and after the passage of a minute Adam heaved a deep sigh, picked up his guitar, and with bent head shuffled away into the night.

Twice during the following week Adam left propitiatory offerings of fish at Rhoda’s cabin, but

on both occasions he went during the cool of the early morning when he felt sure that she would be abroad with the girls, foraging or seeking work.

Upon the second of these occasions, as he reached inside the door to hang his gift on the peg upon which in the old days he had kept his hat, he was startled to find that he was not alone. From the floor near the center of the shadowy room four eyes were following his movements with a tranced scrutiny. He stood returning their gaze while his eyes became accustomed to the darkened interior, and then he saw that they belonged to two children. The eldest—fat, placid, and black—he judged to be about three years old. Upon its lap, and wearing the complacent look of a potential mother, sat a large, disheveled hen.

“Dat’s right, chile,” Adam chuckled, “you hold she till she done cackle. If dere’s any eatin’ round dis house I bet you gets it.”

But this sally brought no response. Wholly engrossed with the business in hand, the child stared, sat, and waited. The other occupant of the room claimed his attention, and Adam noticed that in marked contrast to its companion it was of a gingerbread color, and that there was a red tinge to

its closely kinked hair. It was about fifteen months old, he decided, and, like the one who held the hen, was covered by a freshly washed shirt.

It was only after he had stepped over the threshold into the dazzle of the tropic morning that his mind accepted the incontrovertible fact that, in spite of their differences, both children bore an unmistakable likeness to Rhoda.

He thrust his head back into the doorway, and his lower lip jutted menacingly. "Dere's one thing I forgets to inquire," he informed them. "*What de hell is you doin' here anyhow?*"

From the black child there came no response. In its grip the hen stirred uneasily, and fingers tightened automatically on neck and wing. But the yellow child looked up and its mouth widened with a singularly precocious Irish grin.

Adam stood looking down at it for a moment and his jutting lip retreated, making way for a sheepish answering grin.

"All right, baby," he said, "I done got de bad news." He turned to leave, thought better of it, and added "But anyhow, tell yo' ma she done had a caller."

The following Sunday Adam arrived at a decision. Since his timid overtures had failed to elicit any response, he would proceed boldly, and at any rate put an end to his suspense. He counted heavily upon the assistance of Ramsay MacDonald. Rhoda had always longed for a son, and even though her cabin now seemed well supplied with children it did not occur to him that they would be boys. Rhoda and he had decided long ago that she was one of those women who ran to females, and there was nothing to be done about it. First there had been twin girls, but they had sickened and died before their first birthday. Then had come Crystal and Treasure. Now, even if her affections were engaged elsewhere, he felt confident that she would welcome a fine man-child to raise. And later when she had got fond of his son—well, who could tell what might happen?

Arriving before the cabin he set the boy down on his short, sturdy legs, and taking him by the hand stepped boldly across the threshold.

Today the room had been left open to the sun and wind. The brightly illuminated interior seemed to Adam to be crowded with faces, all vaguely familiar, but elusive. Male laughter, the

bawling of babies, a clear soprano in unfettered flight, and a husky alto trailing it, all combined into a volume of sound that met the visitors at the threshold and filled them with confusion.

Rhoda had never been one for having much company around. He tried to collect his faculties and search her out amid the general confusion. Then he saw her broad back bending over the charcoal fireplace in the far corner. Without looking up she called in a loud voice, "Hush yo' mouth—all of you—ain't you see we got company?"

There was instant silence. Then with an infallible sense of drama the disheveled hen laid an egg, rose triumphantly from her bed in the corner, and pre-empted the stage with her loud egocentric clamor. The fat black child raced on all fours for the prize, was gathered into the flying circle of Rhoda's arm, slapped soundly and replaced. The egg was lifted to a shelf over the stove, and in the momentarily restored quiet, Rhoda said:

"Dat's yo' pa—Crystal an' Treasure. Go speak to 'im."

Adam had never seen two likelier girls, and when they came forward to greet him his feeling

of pride in them very nearly restored his shattered self-confidence.

Crystal was tall and slender, with small hands and feet. She was wearing a thin wash dress that came to her ankles and was patterned with faded pink roses. Adam could see clearly where her short drawers stopped and her shapely brown legs became visible through the sheer material.

She came forward looking him boldly in the eyes, held out her right hand, and said in a perfectly controlled, musical voice, "How do you do?"

"Oh," ejaculated her father, taken aback by this exhibition of poise, "I's well in my health, thank you."

"Dat what de American teachers done do to she," explained Rhoda in a voice that left no doubt of her opinion of imported culture.

Treasure was different. She stood there covered by embarrassment, and it was only after a painful effort that she finally raised her face and gave him one of Rhoda's slow, warm smiles. She had Rhoda's build too, only shorter and stockier, and she was dressed like her mother in a plain white slip which she had belted at the waist with a man's



frayed necktie. Adam's heart went out to her at once. She was more like the Rhoda he had left than the hardened matriarch who presided over the cabin now. He threw an arm about her shoulders and patted her cheek.

"Well, I got two grown women for daughters now," he said, feeling a touch of that sadness which brushes a man when he first realizes that his children are grown.

"An' dat's Oliver an' Sullivan settin' at de table," Rhoda proceeded with the amenities. "You ought to remember all two of dem."

Of course he remembered them, and as their identities emerged in sharp definition he realized why he had been so unpleasantly affected upon entering. He had always disliked them, with the deep unreasoning antagonism of the countryman for the city dweller. And now, with actual hunger menacing the back country, their sleek, well-clothed bodies and complacent expressions seemed like a deliberate affront.

"Oh yes," he conceded without enthusiasm. "I remembers dem. How you does, boys?"

He heard them returning the greeting, Oliver's voice thick and smooth like lard and Sullivan's

high-pitched and drawling, but the words escaped him. Looking at them closely for the first time his heart sank. Before him, without recourse to a single spoken or written word, the record of Rhoda's life during his absence lay open before him. He glanced involuntarily from the sleek bulk of Oliver, with its broad black face and cunning close-set eyes, to the greedy child on the floor; and then from the baby that lay kicking beside it back to the table where Sullivan sat, wiry, dapper, with his gingerbread complexion, and with open ridicule in his knowing Irish grin.

Adam's eyes sought Rhoda's, but she was lifting a pot from the fireplace and setting it aside. Then she slapped two fat parrot fish into an iron spider.

During the ordeal of the introductions Ramsay MacDonald had clung to his father's leg, with his face buried in a fold of blue overall. Now the man stooped down and lifted the child to his arms. It clung to him, and sensing the tension in the air commenced to whimper softly.

It was all so different than Adam had expected. He felt the men looking at him, curious as to how he would take it and slightly amused at his expense; and he felt the two girls, standing together

yet pulling apart—Crystal cutting her eye at the men, ready to laugh if they started; and Treasure fighting down her shyness and sending him an encouraging smile; and Rhoda giving him her back, straight, powerful, telling him nothing at all.

He was suddenly conscious of the child whimpering against his shoulder, featherlight in his arms and needing a woman. Everything had gone wrong, but the impulse that had brought him there swept him irresistibly onward. The speech that he had rehearsed on the way to the cabin was in his throat demanding to be said. He held the child out toward the broad, uncompromising back.

“Look here, Rhoda,” he said, “I got a fine boy here I bring you.”

She turned slowly and looked them both up and down. Her eyes, he saw now for the first time, were wide and somber, and held the pain that she kept from her voice.

“Thank you for rememberin’ me while you was in Tortola,” she told him. “But it looks to me like I got about a houseful now.”

“But,” Adam insisted as he took a step nearer,

"dis is a man-child, Rhoda, an' you always wanted a man-child."

She never had been one to waste a word where a deed would be more convincing. She turned from her pots, dried her hand carefully on the hem of her frock, and stepped to the babies where they sprawled in the middle of the floor. Then she lifted first one little shirt and then the other, presenting to the room at large the indubitable evidence of the infants' maleness. Returning to her cooking, and indicating the two boys with a heavy iron fork, she completed her introduction upon a more formal note.

"Dat biggest chile, he's name Hoover," she informed Adam, "an de little one, he's Patrick—" there was a scarcely perceptible hesitation, then she concluded "after he's pa."

"But," exclaimed Adam, taken completely aback, "I always thought—we used to think dat you—"

She turned and looked at him over her shoulder, and for the first time he saw something in her face that carried him back to the old days. But it was the thing in Rhoda that he had always feared. It was her thinly veiled contempt for all the men in

the world, the feeling that she had given him at times that they were a necessary evil, endurable only because they were so helpless and needed to be mothered, and because she wanted children. He knew what it meant when she looked like that, and he braced himself to take punishment.

"All I needed was a man," she announced succinctly, and went on with her preparations for dinner.

Adam would have left if he could. He would have liked to take his rejected son, effect a dignified exit, and never speak to Rhoda again. But he was so hurt that for the moment his will seemed paralyzed. He sank to a bench beside the door and gathered the boy to his bosom.

It was a great moment for Oliver and Sullivan. They laughed until the tears came; they pounded the table. On the floor below them their detestable progeny caught the contagion and screamed with imbecile merriment. Then, when they had exhausted themselves, they sat on in the full pride of their recently publicized manhood and gloated down upon the intruder.

He could not carry it off as a joke. He could not laugh, because Rhoda had not. She had said it to

give hurt. It wasn't that she would like to hurt him individually. Even now he realized that. It was only that through him she could humble all men, because men thought themselves important, and she resented that. But to humiliate him before these others whom he had always disliked was the sort of thing he would never have believed of her.

Then Treasure got up from her seat on the other side of the room, crossed quickly to him and held out her arms for the child. He went into her embrace without a murmur, and buried his face on her shoulder. Adam looked down into her uplifted face. She was made for tenderness, the full, expressive mouth, the broad, kind brow, and the eyes that were not yet sure enough of themselves to meet another's boldly. He felt his heart expand and take her in, and he told her so in the grateful smile that he gave her. Then she turned away and seated herself on the doorstep with the boy in her lap.

There was a large bowl of okra fungee and a goodly slab of fried fish for everyone. Rhoda set them upon the table and gathered her strangely assorted family about her. She seemed to draw a



sardonic satisfaction from making the three men uncomfortable.

Sullivan and Oliver fell with exaggerated heartiness upon the food, and were voluble in their praise of Rhoda's cooking. It was evident from their manner that neither felt quite at home and that each was trying to impress the other with the fact that he enjoyed the more intimate status.

"You likes dat fish?" their hostess inquired with beguiling gentleness. And when they had voiced enthusiastic assent, she said with a grateful look toward the donor, "Well, you got to thank Adam, den. He been keepin' we-all fat wid de good fish since he come home."

They turned and regarded him with reawakened suspicion, and Adam came very near forgiving her for her slight upon his manhood.

Shortly after dinner Sullivan and Oliver set off for town. Crystal accompanied them, explaining that the hour was approaching for the Sunday afternoon Bible class.

Treasure shepherded the three children out to a small clump of banana trees that banked themselves against the wall of the house and spilled a pool of purple shade on the sun-baked earth.



For several minutes Rhoda and Adam stood in the open doorway feeling the house settle about them into its habitual Sunday afternoon quiet. Under the tattered banana leaves Treasure was singing to the children in her husky contralto. Her song and their drowsy laughter seemed to flow out together into the hot silence and became one with it as they dropped off to sleep, curled like little animals in the protecting circle of her arms.

Adam and Rhoda started moving, saying nothing but falling back into their old places in the pattern, walking together down the long, grassy slope toward the sea. Down they went past the dozen or so cabins that constituted the village, the converging hills drawing away and receding before their advance and the blazing wedge of blue that had held them apart flattening and broadening into the sweep of the Caribbean as the man and woman reached the beach.

Adam directed their steps toward his sloop, and motioned Rhoda to a seat beside him on the gunwale.

"Dis my boat," he announced with the pride of possession.

"So she make a fisherman out of you," Rhoda

commented. "She take yo' feets dem out de dirt an' she put dem in de water. You like dat?"

"It did all right in Tortola," he told her, "but now I's back I want to get on de land. I swear I ain't sweated good since I gone!"

She looked at him somberly and nodded her head. "Dat's it," she said. "Once you's raised to it dere ain't nuthin' else for you. Dey take it from you an' you's done for."

Her hand lay on the gunwale beside him, and he picked it up and turned it over. The bunched calluses made by the machete and hoe handle were gone. The fingers felt almost ineffectual in his grasp. He put it down, and looked at Rhoda.

"Dat was a good life we had," he said simply.

She answered, looking out to sea, and with a great hunger in her voice, "In dem days dere was always something it was time to do; time to break land, time to set new canes, time to cut de full crop, to tie de canes, to hoist de bundle to yo' head an' feel de good weight press down on you till yo' feet bog in de wet places." She raised her head and her voice took on color. "Den you use to step out proud an' handsome 'cause you know what you's totin' is a man's load an' dere's money in it for you

an' yo' young." She paused, and when she spoke again the longing in her voice had given place to bitterness. "But now dere ain't nuthin' but time, and nuthin' to do with it. De ole folks sits down in it an' rots, an' de young ones uses it to get into trouble."

After Rhoda's outburst there followed a silence. There was a question that had to be asked, but Adam could not get started.

"Rhoda," he said at last, "how come you take Oliver an' Sullivan? Wasn't dere no mens left on de island?"

"I take dem," she answered in a hard voice, "because dey got money. An' I take two so dey can keep on payin'. All de womens does dat now. An' ain't nobody gettin' married. You marry a man an' he can starve you. But if yo' chillen has different pas an' de judge hold dem to it, you can live."

"But you an' dem now," Adam hazarded, "you ain't—"

"No!" she helped him out, emphatically. "Not with dem or any man. I ain't yet know one what been worth keepin'."

After her unequivocal declaration, Rhoda sat with her face averted and her eyes, narrowed

against the glare, fixed on the distant silhouette of St. Thomas, which seemed to hover like a mirage between the sky and the intenser blue of the sea.

Adam found nothing that he could say in his defense. But watching her closely he was relieved to see her face soften, and her eyes grow pensive.

"But chillen," she said at length, "dat's different. A house ain't right without chillen."

She rose to go, and brought her gaze back to rest on him for a moment. "An' dat boy of yours. I been studyin' 'bout dat. If you want to leave him you can. Only—" she continued, while the calculating look that he hated came back into her face, "only you got to pay for him—two dollars a month, same as Oliver an' Sullivan."

That was too much for Adam. He seized her shoulder and jerked her around until she faced him squarely.

"Now, by God," he exclaimed with sudden passion, "I ain't goin' take dat. You ain't never had to bargain with me yet, is you?"

"No," she admitted, "I got to give you dat."

"All right—we ain't goin' to start now. An' you ain't goin' suffer—just wait an' see."

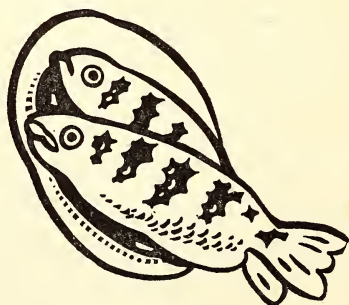
The next afternoon just before sunset Adam

climbed the hill again. In one hand he carried a string of fish so long that the bottom one dragged his tail in the dust: angelfish, yellowtail, parrots, shellfish, porgy, margates—they blazed and smoldered as they swung to his stride with all the colors of the spectrum. In his other hand he balanced an old shingle piled high with golden comb, while across his back, with the late sun glowing red on its seasoned mahogany, was strapped his guitar.

He saw her in the door and he flashed his smile up at her.

“Look at me here,” he shouted. “Look good! I done tell you de truth—ain’t it?”

She could not keep from laughing back—one of her old warm, throaty laughs. And she said, “All right, bring dem in, an’ if you sings low maybe you can stay till moonrise.”



PART TWO







SEVERAL WEEKS passed, and around Adam life settled itself into a definite pattern. So far as Ramsay MacDonald was concerned his problem was solved. The child had been accepted without reservation into Rhoda's family circle, and Treasure had constituted herself his especial provider and defender. But in his own status he had not fared so well. Oliver and Patrick seldom came to the house now, and the last time he had found them there he had swaggered a little, and Rhoda, far from reproving him, had smiled upon him with deceptive meekness. But no sooner had they departed than she set him to hoeing in the small garden that she had begun cultivating since his return. Then tucking her skirts higher so that he could look, desire, and suffer while he worked, she gave her undivided attention to her washtub. Adam knew that he was

being deliberately tantalized, and when he reached the end of his row he threw down the hoe and without saying good-bye strode off to the windmill where he still lived and fretted amid his celibate austerities. It was small comfort that he convinced himself with masculine logic that she really did want him but was set on paying him off for Victoria even if she, too, had to go a lonely road.

But the next day he was back, and unconcernedly she set him a new and even less pleasant task. The garden, she had concluded, required manuring, and Mr. Fred had said that if she sent Adam to the stable lot with a head tray he could bring home several loads. Accordingly, it was by no mere chance that Adam became an instrument in the hands of Providence, and almost without his own volition found himself collaborating with the Deity in the consummation of a miracle.

Presently he arrived at the stable yard of the ruined estate. This enclosure, with its high rock wall, was now used as a corral for horses, for which Mr. Fred had been vainly attempting to find a market since he had closed down the plantation. At one corner of the enclosure stood the substantial little building that had always served as the

estate office, and this, repaired after the hurricane, still functioned as the administrative headquarters of Martha's Haven.

Adam settled himself in a welcome strip of shade against the office wall to rest before entering upon the next step in his project, that of shoveling up the manure and hoisting the heavy tray to his head for the hot trip back to the village. It was a pleasant spot to rest. The lichened rock at his back felt damp and cool, and by comparison the prospect of laboring in the hot sun became singularly unattractive. He was beginning to debate the question of whether his desire to please Rhoda was not carrying him to unnecessary lengths when the stable yard, four horses that had stood for several minutes regarding him suspiciously, and Rhoda, who had floated into his consciousness, flowed softly together and blurred out. Sinking slowly down against the wall he settled himself into a comfortable position and went to sleep.

Mr. Fred and the new administrator from the States, Mr. Lyndall, had been out since early morning inspecting a number of tracts that had been offered for sale. The appropriation had come

through from Washington for a homesteading unit, and it remained only to purchase the most suitable of the bankrupt properties and launch the experiment.

Like many another humanitarian, Tom Lyndall had grieved over the lot of the tenant farmer in the South, but he was unique in that he had tried to do something about it. He had journeyed to Arkansas to assist in the organization of the first tenants' union. There he had spent a month in a county jail, charged with disturbing labor, and upon being released had been escorted across the state line at the point of a shotgun by an employers' committee, and told to travel. He had carried his grievance to Washington and had launched a campaign of such intensity that it was impossible for anyone in official circles to hear the words "tenant farmer" without immediately thinking of Lyndall.

It was therefore inevitable, when the Department in Washington woke up one bright morning to find that President Hoover had left the Virgin Island problem kicking on its doorstep, that it should hand it over to Lyndall. If he yearned over starving Negro tenants, he could have ten thou-

sand of them and welcome—and the blessings of a grateful department to boot.

But the incredible fact was that upon his arrival at his destination he had been met by a delegation of the planters themselves, who were not only willing to present him with their Negroes, but eager to sell him their acres as well. On every side, hands were extended holding not shotguns but Virgin Island swizzles, which, if equally lethal in their effect upon the uninitiated, obviously expressed a more amiable frame of mind. But Lyndall's trouble now lay in the fact that his infant project had been presented to him in swaddling bands of governmental tape, which rapidly became a mass of frustrating knots under his inexperienced hands.

Now, just as Adam was stirring from his sleep, a car drove up and stopped before the office, and Fred Ainman and Tom Lyndall got out. A window was thrown open above Adam's head, and he settled back down to a moment or two of comfortable eavesdropping, undisturbed by the slightest prick of conscience.

Within the shadowy coolness of the room, the two men eased tired bodies into deep chairs, comforted themselves with the contents of a thermos

bottle, and surveyed the wreckage of their once respectable clothing. For hours they had fought their way over abandoned roads inaccessible to a car and choked with thorny acacia bushes.

"It isn't that I mind the expense of feeding five extra bulls," Lyndall said, taking up a plaint that had been interrupted by their arrival. "The government can satisfy its phobia for pampering bulls for all I care, but it's seeing them standing there *being* bulls when what I need is saddle horses for these accursed jungle explorations—"

"Well," said Ainman reasonably, "the answer's simple. Buy my horses out there, then sell me the bulls. I could use them to advantage in my cattle raising."

Lyndall looked at his friend pityingly. "You have only recently ceased to be a Dane and become an American—so I shall excuse your ignorance," he informed him. "What you propose is impossible."

Ainman chuckled. "O. K.," he said, exercising his practiced Americanism. "The answer is, ride the bulls. Yours wouldn't be the first circus that has tried it and made a hit with the gallery."

"Listen," said the administrator. "The mistake



you make is being logical. Now, I could sell the bulls—nobody would stop me. But the money would have to be deposited to the government's account. From then on the procedure would be quite simple. A bill would be introduced in Congress appropriating five hundred dollars for the horses. This wouldn't impress our representatives as exactly important, so I would have to go north and lobby. Time would be a factor, so I would probably have to fly. That would cost more than the horses, but they'd allow that—most likely. Only by that time Congress would have adjourned, and I'd come home and start walking again."

Ainman laughed.

"All right—it's funny," Lyndall said peevishly. "Only try it yourself as a steady diet, and see how you'll like it."

A shadow slanted through the open doorway, and Adam's broad honest face smiled in upon them.

"If you'll pahdon me, Mr. Fred," he began, in his best Tortola manner, then immediately abandoning it for the wider freedom of his native Crucian, hurried on. "I means, Mr. Fred, I couldn't help hearin' what you gentlemens was



sayin' an' I think I knows a way to straighten out all yo' troubles, dem."

The white men exchanged amused glances. "All right," Ainman told him, "you're the man we're looking for. Let's have it."

"Has you tried prayin'?" Adam inquired innocently.

"Praying?" they exclaimed in unison.

Having assured himself of an attentive audience, the visitor insinuated himself across the threshold and said on a note of religious fervor, "Yes, suh! Just so. Mr. Fred he wants bulls, an' you, suh, you wants hosses. What I says is, take it to de Lawd in prayer. Have plenty of faith—den leave it to de Lawd."

Respecting the evident sincerity of their visitor, the white men controlled their expressions of amusement. "So you think He could fix us, do you?" Ainman asked.

"Ain't nuthin' impossible with de Lawd when He gets to miraclin'," he replied sanctimoniously. "You remember about turnin' de water into wine?"

They nodded assent.

"Well, bulls an' horses ain't nuthin' extra. Dey

might even come out talkin' like ole man Balaam's donkey. You remembers about him too?"

"God forbid!" exclaimed Lyndall devoutly. "My bulls know entirely too much."

"De point is," Adam went on, warming up to his theme, "dat if you prays for a miracle, you is duty bound to get everything as near ready as possible—so it won't be no strain. Otherwise de Lawd like as not will be off workin' for somebody else what's got more consideration."

"Exactly," said Mr. Fred. "What would you suggest, Adam?"

"Well, while you gentlemens was talkin', you see, I was sittin' down by dat window an' I got to studyin'. Now it seem like if de bulls dem was fetched out tonight an' put in dat ole pen longside de stable lot, an' de hosses dem was left where dey is, den if we all get down an' pray an' have plenty of faith, de Lawd might take a hand an' change de bulls dem into hosses, an' de hosses dem into bulls."

There was a twitching at the corners of Ain-man's mouth, which he immediately controlled, and the three faces assumed expressions of profound solemnity.

"There is nothing more beautiful than the simple faith of a primitive people," Lyndall affirmed.

"Well, shall we leave it to Providence?" Ainman queried.

"There is an Act-of-God clause in every contract," the administrator remembered. "That must mean something. What do you say?"

"I feel," the cattleman replied, "that this is a very solemn moment, and that we should stand uncovered as we plan to play our humble parts."

That evening the bulls arrived, and Adam, who had been busy all afternoon repairing the abandoned pen, received them and saw that they were made secure for the night.

In the early morning the car returned.

"Has you prayed?" Adam inquired, as the two white men got out.

"All night," Ainman affirmed.

"And fasted," added Lyndall.

Without further speech, Adam led the way through the room and threw open the window that let upon the stable lot—and there instead of the horses stood four magnificent Holstein bulls, looks of mild surprise upon their clean white faces,

and the sun running warm and red over their sleek sides. And from the pen which a few short hours ago had held bulls, four horses peered inquiringly over the rock wall in the direction of their new master.

"To de Lawd ain't nothin' is impossible," announced Adam sententiously.

"Amen!" replied Ainman. Then he took out his wallet and withdrew a crisp five-dollar bill. Lyndall matched it and both were pressed into Adam's hand.

Lyndall said, "And now, about coming to work for me? I understand from Mr. Ainman that you want employment."

Adam stood looking down at the money in his hand. He had never seen so much in his life. Slowly he began to shake his head.

"Not with all dis money to spend," he said at last. "It take plenty time and thinkin' to spend money proper. I reckon I got to be workin' at dat. An' besides, I's workin' for Rhoda now. But if dere's any little jobs—"

"Miracles, for instance," suggested Ainman.

"Dat's right, suh," Adam replied, dropping his solemn manner and grinning broadly. "If you

stands in need of a miracle at any time I's always at yo' sarvice."

When the white men had left Martha's Haven, Adam saw carefully to the bars that separated the bulls and the horses; then turned his footsteps homeward. But at the large outer gate he was made unpleasantly aware of the humble mission which had put him in the way of his recent good fortune. There awaiting him was the large tray piled high with manure which he had placed in readiness for his departure.

For a long moment he regarded it, his nose wrinkled in distaste. "And so you think dat a man with ten dollar in the pocket goin' tote you home on the head!" he said scornfully. He started going, then turned back to jeer: "You offends me, you stinks awful, an' you can stay dere till you rots." Then fingering the crisp bills in his pocket he started out confidently. But presently his pace slackened and he shouted back defiantly, "No, not for nobody, not even for Rhoda."

A hundred yards from the stable the road turned northward, and at this point, although the condition of the highway was excellent, Adam appeared unable to negotiate the turn. Twice he

tried and twice he failed to gather momentum. At last he gave it up and, after assuring himself that no one was lurking near by to witness his capitulation, commenced to push his reluctant feet back in the direction of the tray.

One hot noon just as the village was drifting off into its siesta a car drove up and a young man attired in white linen and wearing a pith helmet got out. Adam and Rhoda were resting under the bananas with the three boys burrowing in the warm sand around them. The young man approached, looking as cool, clean, and otherworldly as a seraphim. When he had reached them he stood looking down, and smiled charmingly.

"Good afternoon, Auntie," he addressed Rhoda. Then turning to Adam, said on a more familiar note, "hello, Uncle."

With the somnolence of the siesta upon them, and the astonishing greeting sounding in their ears, they could only gape stupidly up at him. But he was not in the least discomposed. Still smiling his warm, professional smile, he drew out a little book and started to ask them questions.

"Your name, please?" he said, looking at the man.

"Adam Work."

"And yours?" with a lifted eyebrow directed toward the woman.

"Rhoda Berg."

"Pardon me," he chuckled discreetly, "I thought you were married."

"We ain't," Rhoda announced defiantly.

"But—but I must get this straight." Then he looked at Adam. "You live here, don't you?"

At the same moment that the man spoke an affirmative the woman uttered an indignant negative, producing a choral "Yeno."

After some hesitation he wrote, then looked at Adam. "Well, anyhow," he decided, "I'll enter you as the head of the family."

"Young gentleman," Rhoda said with great dignity, "I don't know who you is. An' I don't think I's your auntie. But if you is out gatherin' family heads, you best put down Rhoda Berg." That went into the Record. Then came the next question.

"How many children have you?"

"Three," said Adam.



"Five," said Rhoda.

It took ten minutes to work that out. It was comparatively simple, listing fathers. But there was something very confusing about the record of a small black infant named Ramsay MacDonald. It seemed that the Berg woman was his mother, Adam Work his father, but that in some extraordinary way God had brought him to birth on the island of Tortola, through the kind offices of a stranger named Victoria. By the time names, ages, employment, and other data had been recorded, the young man was sweating profusely, and the smile was lacking when, as he departed, he handed them each a card.

These cards, so the instructions read, when presented at a specified time and place would entitle the holder thereof to food and clothing. But as nothing was said about going to work, and as it is a well-known fact that man must work to live, they concluded that a practical joker had come to St. Croix. They hid the cards away, bided their time, and were prepared to meet with ready acquiescent laughter the eventual announcement that the whole thing had been a white man's joke.

Later they made cautious inquiries as to who the young men were, but these brought forth information which tended to increase rather than diminish their suspicions. Gossip linked them with a certain strange and alarming bird, a picture of which had appeared, simultaneously with their arrival, in shop windows and government buildings. This odd migrant evidently lived upon scrap iron, for it clutched in one of its claws an old sugar-mill cog and regarded it with a famished and predatory eye. Later, however, a rumor gained currency to the effect that both the birds and the young men were creatures of a legendary being who responded to the title of Noodeal. He had not yet arrived on the island but was expected momentarily. He was coming from America to make everybody happy. The ships that had been discharging cargoes in town belonged to him, and the bright young men were there to prepare the way. When all preparations were completed he would appear in the flesh, and where his footstep fell blessings would flower. Then would come a time, it was said, when a man might lie in the warm sunshine all day, if that was his pleasure, bestirring himself only to partake of

a bountiful meal or to lift his voice in song. It sounded suspiciously like the heaven that had been promised from the local pulpits, but was attainable only by death. Adam and Rhoda, after mature discussion, decided that therein lay the joke. Someday they would be told that they could present their cards attached to their death certificates, and then the time for eating and singing would commence.

In the first heat of the long summer the mangoes ripened, and the people stopped worrying about food. They could lie beneath bending branches while the fruit plopped down upon them, and the deep shade comforted them. The children grew sleek and sticky, and the roads were littered with the discarded refuse. For longer than a month they lived in the Garden of Eden, and the last mango swelled to luscious maturity and fell. Then an angel came and threw them out into a world where a man must forage or starve. So they thought again, wistfully, of the bright young men and their incredible intimations of a New Eden.

Then one afternoon when Adam was trudging

along the public road he heard behind him the sound of an approaching automobile. He drew aside to let it pass, looked up, and knew instantly that the great moment was upon him.

It had been a dry season and the roads, deep in soft powdery dust, had a continual haze hanging over them. Now the western sun striking athwart the minute suspended particles converted the public highway into a veritable Glory Road, and down the dazzling perspective, like Elijah in his chariot of fire, came an incandescent presence surrounded by a shining white company.

Shielding his eyes from the light, Adam stepped back into a little group of Negroes who were huddled against a fence, and in awed silence they watched the apparition.

The presence was borne forward in a vehicle longer and more glittering than any automobile that he had ever imagined. The driver was fittingly clothed in a white uniform, and beside him sat the chief doctor of the island also immaculately clad. The rear seat was occupied by Mr. Lyndall. But that important mortal was now completely obscured by the presence. This was bodied forth

in the form of a man in middle life, portly enough to endow him with dignity, but escaping gross fleshiness. Upon his broad brow rested an expression of ineffable benignity, and his noble, yet resolute features beamed love and generosity down upon the humble roadside folk. He was, like the others, in shining white, but instead of the conventional helmet his head was covered by a broad-brimmed panama, and a black string tie with unusually long ends whipped to right and left in the steady breeze.

Standing there and looking up at him Adam had a divine revelation. The familiar countryside was blotted out, in its place he saw an enormous cornucopia let down from heaven, and from its vast horn poured all that heart of man could desire. Standing beside it, and grown to heroic stature, was posed the presence. One arm was thrown around the great horn and the other was extended in a sweeping invitation to the cosmos.

He became conscious of the nagging voices of his companions, and he turned on them furiously.

"Silence!" he thundered. "Ain't you knows what you done witnessed? Dat's he—heself—in de flesh. Dat's NOODEAL."

"Great Gawd, is dat so, Adam?" someone exclaimed. Then a woman's shrill voice cut the awed silence:

"Glory Hallelujah, le's we go to town and start eatin'!"



PART THREE







IT WAS A midsummer afternoon and the heat in the square was intense. The green of trees and grass held out an illusory promise of coolness and a non-descript crowd had collected upon the benches for the weekly band concert. But there was no breeze from the bay, and the sun, well past the meridian, smote the flanking stucco façades and was reflected in a white glare beneath the sheltering branches.

But there is an excess of heat which carries its own compensation, and upon this particular afternoon it operated like an anesthetic upon the listeners, so that their punishment was mitigated by a blessed dimming of the perceptions. They sat, sweated, and suffered scarcely at all under the waves of sound that crashed in eccentric circles from the stand. Indeed, here or there a face would light momentarily with parental pride as some

glittering brass assaulted the heavens, for the musicians were drawn from the local high school, and tribal loyalty rather than civic pride had moved the audience hither from the joys of the siesta.

Upon a rear bench, relaxed in body but with observant eyes ranging the crowd, sat Adam.

For sixty minutes the band had been crashing its way down the list of numbers that were typed on a slip of paper upon the bandmaster's stand, and now after the last discord of the last number there followed a moment of silence.

The conductor stood eying them with an expression that struggled between amusement and despair. He was the only white man upon the platform and was obviously of Gaelic extraction. His three hundred and fifty pounds was clad in a sweat shirt and white duck trousers, a belt and leather sandals. During the ardors of the preceding hour sweat had saturated his shirt and descended below the belt in a dark line halfway down the broad buttocks which he presented to the audience. There was something definitely familiar about him—not as an individual, but as a type. He looked, moved, and swore like a top sergeant, and

he had evidently got his musical education in an army band.

He rapped smartly upon his rack and the musicians straggled to their feet, shaking their bodies down into their wet white uniforms and hoisting their heavy brasses up after them. He rapped again and with laudable precision they were off in full cry. At times the pursuit of the elusive air would become lost in an impenetrable forest of discords. Then, as though by common consent, there would be a pause, and gathering around with complete unanimity of purpose the pack would suddenly all together attempt to bay it out of hiding. In a flash it would elude them and be off again with the field in hot pursuit.

Halfway through the first stanza the conductor turned and discovered that the audience had remained seated. He stopped the music, and with a wide lifting gesture of the hands started over at the beginning.

On the benches one or two sitters stirred restlessly, sensing some obscure inadequacy in themselves but not being able to identify it. Then giving it up they settled comfortably back into their seats.

Again the leader stopped the din and sent the players back to the opening phrase, but this time over the benches there was not even any curiosity, and the number of those conducting salvage operations among the ruins of their wrecked siestas had increased.

He swung about on them while the band fell into silence.

"My God!" he bellowed. "Can't you cannibals recognize even *that* tune? Don't any of you know what it is?"

There was a moment of oppressive embarrassment, then a small pert child got up and said shrilly, "It's 'A Long Way to Tipperary.' "

He threw down his baton. "No!" he bellowed again. "It isn't! It's 'The Star-Spangled Banner.' The navy played it at you for years, and now your own sons and daughters are giving it to you—and you wouldn't know it if it came up and bit you."

He stood looking down at them, and their obvious alarm calmed him. Finally his Irish mouth twitched at the corners. "O God," he said hopelessly—and then he made them a speech on Americanization:

"Listen," he said very earnestly, "that's your na-

tional anthem you've been listening to. You're under the Stars and Stripes. You're American citizens."

He paused for emphasis, and from a rear bench a single voice in monotonous conversational tone articulated the word "Hoorah." Immediately below the stand an anemic visiting Puerto Rican writhed under the ill fortune that had placed him so conspicuously, and feeling that something had to be done about it, said in a low, desperate voice, "Viva!"

"No," the big man continued, a sarcastic note creeping into his voice, "you don't have to make any noise about it. We couldn't ask that much of you. We do that. That's what we're here for. All we ask is that when that tune is played you get up, put your weight squarely on your feet and keep it there until the music stops. That's all except that at the same time you must remain uncovered."

In the rear of the gathering an aged woman sprang to her feet and with feverish fingers commenced to tear at her head handkerchief. But she was immediately restrained by a half-grown girl

who, dragging her down, admonished in a stage whisper:

"No, gran'ma, you ain't got no cause to undress. He ain't mean you. It's only de mens dem what got to take off dere hats."

The ancient took her seat reluctantly. "He ain't say nuthin' 'bout mens," she muttered argumentatively. "He say you got to uncover. Dat must be one of dese new rules dem is always makin'."

The humor of the episode moved through the crowd like slow fire, then caught and blazed. They rocked back and forth, slapped backs and thighs, whooped and chuckled, and forgot all about the irate bandmaster and his instructive discourse. Meanwhile he stood gripping the rail before him, controlling his impatience as best he could. When the noise finally subsided he raised his hand for silence and proceeded.

"It grieves me," he said, "to interrupt your merrymaking. But I shall be brief and to the point in summing up your obligations as citizens. Now listen carefully. We don't ask much of you. You have only got to stand up twice a week—once when you wait in line for your relief rations, and once when you hear 'The Star-Spangled Banner.' The



rest of the time you can go home and *lie down*. Now, that is what it means being a subject of the United States. I hope I have made myself clear."

He motioned the band to its feet, then delivered his closing admonition. "And if what these musicians give you sounds like 'Tipperary' don't let that worry you. They know it's the national anthem because they see it written on a piece of paper. So when they stand, you do the same. Now, please."

He lifted his baton and the band crashed into the opening phrase. The audience, realizing that it was being laughed at and enjoying it thoroughly, sprang to its feet, flashing teeth and eyes up at the stand. Then they quieted down, and before the final long-drawn discord they had achieved expressions of patriotic exaltation that must have satisfied even their exacting instructor.

When the musicians had trooped laughing and talking down out of the stand Adam went around to the library building and took up his position in the shade of the high steps where he could observe all that was taking place. He had spent little time in town since Noodeal had landed on St.

Croix. Like the others, he reported punctually for the free distribution of food and clothing, but he always made tracks with his load for Rhoda's cabin and left the administration of the supplies entirely in her hands.

He took all his meals with her now, and had been delegated a certain limited authority over the children, but when supper was over and the livestock put out for the night he, too, was expelled inexorably and the door was made fast behind him. It had been a humiliating probation, and it had culminated the evening before in a revolt. Rhoda's old rooster, Prince Gustav, had been making his lordly rounds when his predatory eye fastened itself on a plump young hen that was sticking close to its mistress's skirts inside the cabin. The rooster had hopped into the doorway when Adam, whose own prohibitions had converted him into a moral reformer, kicked out at the intruder. "No, you don't neither," he had growled. "Git along an' behave yo'self." But the rooster hadn't obeyed. Instead, he had thrown back his head and crowed derisively full into the man's face. Rhoda's audible chuckle had fanned Adam's smoldering passions into a blaze, and

later, desperately, before setting out for his lonely tower he had attempted to make love to her. She had easily disengaged herself from his powerful hands and had shoved him protesting out the door. Then, through the open window, she had laughed in his face.

She had pointed out that the island was full of young gals who hadn't found men out yet. If that was all he was after, she had assured him, he was a fool for hanging round her cabin, because now, thanks to him, she knew what she knew.

That had, of course, been more than a man with proper pride could stand, and so today he was watching the crowd, trying to get Rhoda out of his mind, and following with a painstakingly salacious eye the swinging buttocks of each young woman who passed. But he was in the act of accepting defeat when Oliver came along and saluted him with boisterous good fellowship.

"Well, brother," he said in his rich, oily voice, as he caught step with Adam, "an' how's you an' Rhoda gettin' along?"

It was many weeks now since either Oliver or Sullivan had been to the cabin, and it was evident that both men conceded Adam's prior claim. He

assured Oliver of their happiness, drawing a thin satisfaction from the fact that the man believed they were living together.

There was a new comic element about Oliver, and Adam, after overcoming his aversion sufficiently to make an appraisal, discovered that it was his hat. High-crowned and of light-gray felt, it was indeed an odd adornment for the tropics.

Oliver, however, seemed very proud of it. Taking it off and allowing his companion to examine it, he explained that it was the latest importation from America. Then he dropped his superior air.

"I's been wantin' to drop in an' talk to you. You's heard, I suspect, that I been made the sexton of the Reformed Church?"

Adam indicated that the important news had escaped him, and the voice became censorious. "Well, if you an' Rhoda worshiped regular like good Christians you'd have heard." He paused for emphasis, then added, "An' that ain't all you'd have heard neither."

"Dat so?" Adam inquired, quickening his steps until his unwelcome companion panted along beside him. "Well, den, what else?"

Oliver caught him by the coat and arrested his

flight, then asked with solemn emphasis, "Who's feedin' you an' Rhoda?"

"Noodeal," Adam responded, wondering what was coming.

"Who gives the orders—the hand what feeds or the hand what eats?"

"De han' what feeds."

"Very well—lissen. We is livin' now in an *en*-lightened age. The government, the church, everybody say the people got to stop livin' in sin. They say you and Rhoda got to get married."

For a moment the open candor of Adam's face was marred by a look of low cunning. He knew Rhoda's disdain for the institution, and he had old scores to settle with Oliver. The situation was pregnant with possibilities. But he must proceed with caution or Oliver's suspicions would be aroused. He pointed out that he had been married before.

That, Oliver ruled promptly, would not count. Victoria had taken advantage of his ignorance. It had all been a long time ago—and besides it was a clear case of desertion on her part, since Adam was where he belonged and she was in Tortola.

"How much it cost to get married?" Adam inquired suspiciously.

"We's just brought the price down in the interests of morality," Oliver replied righteously. "It ain't cost but one dollar and forty cent now."

"And de sexton gets how much out of dat?"

Oliver was pained at the suggestion of an ulterior motive.

"Oh, a matter of forty cent or so for opening the church," he deprecated.

"All right," Adam announced with decision, "here's my proposition. Rhoda wouldn't lissen to me, but she got respec' for yo' judgments. You show she de error of she ways, an' persuade she to get married an' I'll make dat little forty cent an even five dollar an' you can get it de day of de ceremony."

For a moment Oliver hesitated.

"Five dollar," hissed Adam conspiratorily.

"All right," agreed Oliver finally. "I's plannin' to get married myself an' I's full of the right kind of conviction. I's goin' out that way now and I'll see if I can make plain the desires of the Lord."

Adam took the longest way home. It was strange



how his spirits had risen. He swung along on his short, powerful legs, making up a song about Noodeal—humming a line, then fitting in words:

“Noodeal say when you come to die  
De time has pass’ when you got to fly.  
Jus’ set at ease an’ take de wheel  
An’ roll into Heaben in an automobile.”

He came to Mr. Chris’s store and turned in. The whole character of the little shop had changed. Instead of the few bolts of cotton print that had constituted the dry goods department, the shelves showed rolls of bright flimsy ribbon, lace, and imitation silks. Upon a rack hung a row of rayon dresses, and there was a small showcase of ten-cent-store jewelry. Around these novelties clustered a bevy of girls from the neighboring estate villages.

Adam let his eyes wander about the transformed emporium, amazed at the changes that a few months could make. It had all started by Noodeal trying to feed black people on white people’s food, he supposed. But the Negroes had soon found a way around that. The canned goods from America,



the good Danish butter and cheese with which he was so generous, could be resold to the estate landlords, and the money derived therefrom was enough to keep the fungee pot going, buy a little tobacco for the men and this unheard-of finery for the women.

Nobody had to work. That was the amazing part of it. But looking at the crowd gathered in the little store, Adam had his doubts. What was it that Rhoda had said about time? That there was too much of it, that the old folks sat down in it and rotted, and the young ones used it to get into trouble.

Behind the low counter, in a privacy that was nothing more than a contemptuous gesture at the proprieties, a young woman was trying on several dresses, evidently experiencing difficulties in making a selection. Her back was toward Adam, and he could see only that she was tall and well made, that a great deal of her was showing, and that the proceedings were of interest not only to the group of girls who were offering advice, but to two youths who sat upon the counter drinking bottled soda and cutting their eyes in her direction. She lifted a cloud of flame-colored stuff over her head, let it

fall, and wriggled arms and head through apertures. Then she turned excitedly to the girls and Adam saw that it was Crystal.

He could see what a quick thinker she was, and in the midst of his shame and anger he had to give her unwilling admiration for that. She kept recognition out of her face, and turning quickly pushed a small pile of silver that lay on the counter in the direction of the proprietor.

"Here's yo' money, Mr. Chris," she called. "I'll take this one."

Her fingers moved nimbly along the row of buttons, and her first recognition of Adam was a swift veering dash past him toward the door. He reached out and took her wrist and pulled her around to face him. But at the touch of her flesh all his anger melted into sadness, and he stood looking at her, saying nothing.

She wrenched her arm free and he let it go. Then he said, struggling against the tide of sadness that made speech hard, "Why you had to uncover yo' body in public, chile? Why you have to shame you an' me?"

Free of him, and poised lightly for flight, she looked him boldly in the eyes for a moment, then

tossing her head up she sucked her teeth loudly in contempt, turned and ran out the door and down the road in the direction of town.

There was a burst of laughter that hushed abruptly under his scowl. Then he turned his back on them and walking slowly, heavily, took his way toward Martha's Haven.

He had forgot about Oliver now, and had ceased to speculate upon the fate which had overtaken him as a result of his efforts to win Rhoda over to matrimony. He still kept seeing the slim figure of his daughter running down the road, with the tall coconut palms whipping the wind above her and the new dress held high in both hands so as not to impede her flight. She spent very little time at home now. Since Mr. Wineblow had arrived on the island to teach them opera she had been spending most of her nights in town at the home of a cousin of Rhoda's so that she could attend rehearsals. This Mr. Wineblow, to whom she referred as director, had told her that if she worked hard he would give her a big piece to sing in the opera, and that he would make a real singer of her before she got through.

They played all day and most of the night in a

big warehouse near the public landing. Once he had gone there to tell Crystal that she must come home, and he had been met at the door by Sullivan, who had informed him that he was Sir Joseph Porter, K.C.B. and that strangers were not admitted to rehearsals. Then, just as Adam reached for him, the door had been slammed in his face.

It was all very mystifying and disquieting. A year ago, if a door had been slammed and locked between him and one of his children he would have kicked it down, taken the delinquent home, administered a sound thrashing, and been at peace with himself and his God. But now he didn't know. There were forces at work around him whose power he had no way of estimating and which made him feel singularly unsure of himself. It was a sad fact, he thought, that there was no free gift, that it was just as Oliver said, and the hand that did the feeding gave the orders.

That brought his thoughts back to Oliver. He would have had ample time to reach Martha's Haven and present his proposition to Rhoda. Adam's pace quickened in pleased anticipation, and he was soon in sight of the cabin. But as he advanced his hopes waned. Never, he thought, had

he witnessed so peaceful a prospect. Above the sharp line of the horizon the sun hung poised for its dive into the Atlantic, and hushed expectancy brooded over the island. Through the lucent air village noises rang bell-like, each sound seeming to trail faint diminishing vibrations after it as it lapsed into silence. Adam paused and let his gaze travel out to the horizon, and he felt his sadness and doubt and anger leaving him. He didn't much care now, even if Rhoda had given Oliver his deserts, and he'd stop wondering about Crystal. There was something here in his own island that was telling him to wait, be patient, and everything would come out all right.

He started down toward the cabin. There was no sign of life in the yard, but when he got to the door he heard Rhoda singing. Peering inside he saw her sitting on an old keg rocking back and forth with Hoover in her arms. Adam felt a pang of jealous resentment at Oliver's boy, for he had never seen her look so tenderly and sadly at any of his own children.

She glanced up and saw him watching and she stopped singing. After a moment she said, "Adam, dis is the poorest chile I ever bring up. The sins of

gluttony and covetousness was born in he, and he skin is tight with bad blood. But I goin' strive for my own blood in him, and if Gawd stan' by me I goin' make a man out of he anyhow."

"But you love him," Adam accused sullenly. "You love him better than yo' flesh an' mine."

"No," she said musingly, "not better, but different. But dat's something ain't no use for you to study about. Dat's something ain't nobody knows but Gawd and women."

"Oliver been here?" he demanded abruptly.

She shifted the baby, freeing her right hand which she lifted and studied with a look of quiet satisfaction. Twice she made a fist of it, then opened it slowly, stretching it wide and flat. She seemed to draw a sensuous pleasure from contemplating it; then it went back, curving tenderly about the child.

"Yes," she said, "Oliver's been here. He stayed for long as it would take to walk to de vegetable patch an' back. He ain't never comin' back again."

Behind him in the gathering dusk Adam heard a commotion, and looking down he saw the scrawny hen that had been clutched in Hoover's arms when he had first encountered him. Rhoda



had ended by giving it to the child for his own pet. She had said that since he caught all its eggs anyway he might as well take care of it. Now it was turning around preparing to settle for the night, and was emitting contented cluckings. It had got itself a new nest in the shade of the low doorstep. Some exciting intuition prompted Adam to reach down, dislodge the fowl, and have a look. No, there could be no mistake—none at all. The new nest was the battered but still recognizable remains of Oliver's new American felt hat.

Later, as he tramped to his lonely tower, the earlier mood of depression returned to Adam. He couldn't laugh at Oliver now even if he had felt the weight of Rhoda's hand. What much better had she given him after all the months of waiting and service? Then he started thinking of Crystal, trying to forget the treatment she had given him, remembering back to a time when she was nearer a part of himself. Then Rhoda again, but in his mind she was a great weariness that lay perilously close to defeat, and instinctively he veered around it wondering instead how a man could be so tired who had done no work, and marveling at how many new and hitherto unguessed hungers there



were waiting for a man whose belly was filled with food.

Above him the road rose gently to the hilltop upon which his tower, silhouetted against the stars, presented the only clearly defined mass in a formless world. Beyond that the road dipped gently toward the sea, to continue along the shore to the next estate that lay to the eastward.

Now as he climbed the slope he began to hear singing, intermittently at first, then lifting to him over the summit of the hill with a continuous, breathless quality, and in a voice so high that he concluded it was probably a child afraid of the darkness and singing to keep up her small courage.

Drawing closer and closer as they ascended, yet each hid from the other by the summit of the hill, her voice seemed to Adam to take on a disembodied, almost a supernatural, quality. She was singing an old St. Croix song that went far back into his memory, and the whole air about him seemed charged with the frightened urgency that he had felt in the music long before he had been able to distinguish any words.

He reached the summit first, and even in the darkness he could tell that she had seen him, for

her singing hung a moment, then became more and more broken as she climbed, and as fear kept beating down the sound.

When they stood face to face in the narrow road he could see in the starlight that she was not a child, but a woman as they are reckoned on St. Croix—fourteen or fifteen years, he judged, but with the skeletal lightness of a bird and hips so narrow that he wondered whether so frail a creature could bring a child to birth.

He closed the distance and stepped into the living aura of her fear, feeling it pulsing about him, stirring the stagnant tides of his own being, waking a perverse sense of power in him.

His initial impulse to speak the quick reassuring word was gone. He was shaken suddenly by an irresistible urge to master. To take in kindness and gentleness, but to take. The something that had gone out of him to both Rhoda and Crystal flowed back and met in the girl who stood waiting before him in the vague half-light. He reached forward and took her hand and felt first her will, then, as it seemed to him, her very substance flow into him, drawing them together until their bodies touched.

It was still night when she left the tower, and after she had gone a few steps she took up her song, lifting it against the immensity of the tropic night, at first in broken, uncertain bars, then with the same frightened breathlessness that Adam had first noticed.

He stood and watched her go, melting slowly into the darkness that deepened as the road descended. She had told him that her name was Esther, that she lived on Adventure estate, and that she would come to him in the tower every night that he chose to send for her. These things she had told him not because, even in the hours just passed, there had burst upon them any great mutual passion, but because her destiny had come to her that way. She had stopped and met it. Then she had taken up her song again and gone out into the night.

But Adam, as he stood there, did not expand his chest after the manner of the triumphant male. Nor did he announce to the stars the record of his physical prowess. Instead, he was invaded by an overwhelming sense of futility. The pathetic surrender of the little creature whom he had possessed had only served in some strange way to

widen the gulf between himself and Rhoda, and had left with him no compensating solace, not even a physical appeasement, only a sort of vast emptiness.

The road that connected Martha's Haven with Christiansted, while not the principal island thoroughfare, was well traveled. Several estates lay along its meandering way, and the village folk were constantly passing to and from the town. Along this road one afternoon marched Rhoda, a large basket containing her relief provisions balanced upon her head, and her free, effortless stride swinging her steadily along in the direction of home. Presently she overtook a party of women from her neighborhood similarly laden and, accommodating her pace to theirs, entered into their talk. Observing much and saying little, as was her custom, she noticed what a pretty picture they made as they moved along through the broken sunlight under the mangoes that bordered the road. The traces of worry and hunger had left their faces, and the haunches of the women, swinging rhythmically as they marched, were rounded and firm under their tightened skirts. A dozen or

more children trailed along behind the procession, sucking knobs of hard candy on short sticks, and their skins had a tight, shiny look that was new to them.

The road, too, had changed, and with a swiftness and completeness that suggested black magic. Formerly as it left the town it had passed through a section of small dilapidated native shelters where ravenous curs and gaunt, formidable roosters, which boasted a touch of the gamecock in their ambiguous ancestry, had fought an endless battle for survival, and where, under the flapping galvanized iron of the roofs, the population had dozed by day, and by night had squandered their depleted vitality in song.

Now in the place of these shelters had sprung up a row of small square houses which the government had erected of immaculate concrete, each complete with cistern and privy, and upon the narrow identical verandas sat the beneficiaries of all of this suburban elegance. But Rhoda thought they looked strangely ill at ease and bewildered against their background of assertive cleanliness.

She noticed that the head of the column of women had stopped in the road before the last cot-

tage in the row. This house was larger than the others and already had clusters of bright-colored croton bushes banked against its walls. Before the building a man, whom she recognized as Oliver, was erecting a small bulletin board facing the road. He was in his shirt sleeves, and with short, inexpert strokes of an ax was driving the stake into the ground. Then, ignoring the gathering group of watchers, he returned to the house and a moment later reappeared with hammer and tacks and a notice painted on a large cardboard. Exuding conscious virtue, he proceeded to tack the card to the planks.

On the veranda a woman appeared, her ample figure buttoned tightly into expensive black and teetering on high-heeled patent leather pumps.

"That's right, Oliver," she called in a loud, bullying voice, "put it where all the erring sisters can see. Maybe it will show them how the Lord feels about folks what don't get married."

"What's de Widder Hester doin' in dat house with Oliver?" Rhoda inquired of a neighbor.

"Ain't you hear?" the woman asked in surprise. "Dey got married last week, an' now dey say everybody got to get married too."



Oliver had finished his work and had returned to the house, and the women clustered about the board. In bold letters they saw written:

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers.

—Corinthians 6:9

Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.

—Corinthians 7:2

Rhoda lifted her basket down and set it carefully beside the road. The women formed a tight little knot about the board, spelling the words aloud, fitting them together until they made sense. Then there was a long, portentous silence. On the new cement gallery of the suburban bungalow Oliver and his wife swayed back and forth in new yellow rocking chairs, their eyes resting on a glowing mass of croton foliage.



"Who Oliver mean by dat?" one of the women faltered.

"He mean you an' he mean me," Rhoda said. "He mean every woman on dis island what's been livin' by de unmarried law and had better sense than to tie herself to a man."

She pushed her way through the group, her arm extended. "Let me get at dat sign. I'll show him."

She had almost touched it when Oliver's voice arrested her.

"Take yo' hand off the Word of God," he commanded, "unless you want to fry in hell for eternity."

Her recoil was instantaneous. But a moment later, looking at him taking his ease on the porch, her eyes narrowed, and at the same instant man and wife rose to their feet.

"God ain't said nothin' about my hand an' yo' hide," Rhoda announced as she started forward.

It was extraordinary how, without any exhibition of unseemly haste, the two large bodies on the gallery moved, flowed through the door, closed it after them. The going had about it the quality of movement characteristic of great balloons, in

which speed is invested with a dignity that conceals its presence. Where recently there had been matter there was now space. That was all.

Rhoda had not yet reached the step when the house had placed itself in a position for defense. Realizing her impotence, she turned back to the crowd. "Don't let dat fat hypocrite scare you," she admonished them. "There's ways of shuttin' his mouth, le's we go home and think."





PART FOUR





ONE HOT June morning a steamer discharged a number of enormous trunks on the dock at Christiansted. A young Negro who had been watching the unloading with eager eyes raced up the water front to a massive stuccoed building and stopped before a door which bore the legend, REHEARSAL HALL. He shook the door, then beat upon it violently. It was thrown open, revealing the slightly mad eyes which are characteristic of theatrical directors on the eve of a production, spectacles athwart an inquisitive nose, a small agitated body, and gesticulating arms. The breathless Negro imparted his information. The little man pushed out glad cries, and started for the dock at a run, while through the open door boomed a song in which the syncopation of Crucian speech played variations upon a stirring British theme, and proclaimed:

“For a British tar is a soaring soul,  
As free as a mountain bird!”

On the dock ready hands lifted the trunks to a waiting truck, wheels turned, and presently, under the excited direction of the little man with glasses, the precious cargo was unloaded, lifted into the building, and the great traveling cases set out in a line against the wall of the rehearsal hall. The chorus of British seamen became suddenly twenty excited black Crucians, and with the pianist, the principals, the scenic artists, and the costumers assembled quickly about the director. In a silence the dramatic quality of which was not lost upon him, he produced a number of keys, fitted one to the lock of the first great trunk and threw back the lid.

The effect upon the onlookers was all that could have been desired, and as he lifted and shook out one glittering uniform after another, displaying briefly the royal reds and navy blues, the bobbing epaulettes, the sashes, and decorations, his audience could only gasp its admiration.

And yet even in the first moment of handling



these unbelievable splendors he seemed perplexed, and as he probed deeper this perplexity developed into a sort of nervous frenzy that would not let him stop until he had opened and examined every container. He went back to the first, picked up a coat, weighed it in his hand, shook his head, and felt of the heavy flannel of the trousers. Then he mopped the sweat from his face and said in a bewildered fashion, "I can't understand it. I ordered tropic weight, and this stuff would smother an Eskimo." The word "Eskimo" seemed to give him an idea, for he repeated it musingly. And then he said something that showed the onlookers what a fine character they had been privileged to know in their director. It was evident that something had gone wrong, and that someone was to blame, and yet in a reverent voice that was scarcely marred at all by an incongruous and slightly malicious grin, he said, "God help the Alaska unit next winter."

But Mr. Wineblow was of that rare type which can be both a philosopher and a man of action, and so no sooner had he accepted the inevitable and uttered his pious sentiment than he plunged headlong into his final preparations. Presently,

from a rear door of the building, two men with whitewash brushes, a bucket of paste, and an armful of posters, emerged and commenced to plaster the town with announcements which read:

VIRGIN ISLANDS OF U.S.A.

WILL PRESENT

H.M.S. *PINAFORE*

Or, The Lass That Loved a Sailor

An Opera by

W. S. GILBERT & ARTHUR SULLIVAN

On the Square at 8 P.M.

June 28-29-30

Public Admitted

On the evening preceding the opera, Adam came nearer to breaking through the armor of Rhoda's reserve than he had since his return. After supper he had sat on the doorstep picking his guitar, and singing to himself, and when she had finished her work and the children were in bed she came and sat quietly beside him. The moon, which lacked only one night of the full, sailed

hugely up over the eastern hills, became entangled in a diaphanous cloud and shot it through with a lunar rainbow. Then, while they watched, the spectrum wavered and dissolved, the separate tints floated and shifted in a soft chaos of color like lights in an opal, the colors drained out, the cloud pulled free, and they sat again in a drench of clean whiteness.

After a long silence, Rhoda sighed, then she turned and looked intently into Adam's face.

"Dat's so lovely, it make you grieve," she said softly. "Why you think dat is, Adam?"

"It sets you thinking, an' most thoughts is sad thoughts, an' most people when dey stops laughin' is heavyhearted," Adam philosophized.

"You grieve about Crystal?" she asked him.

He looked at her in surprise. "How you know she's in my mind now?"

"I know," she answered.

"I grieve," he said, "for my flesh an' yours, because it has turned into a stranger. An' because she's makin' for trouble, an' we can't do nothin'." He told her then of their daughter's behavior in the store, and how she had brought shame and ridicule upon him. He leaned closer in the bright

moonlight to study her face. "Tell me," he asked, "why you let she leave home an' go to live in town with Rachel? You know Rachel ain't our kind of people."

She thought a moment, then she said:

"You can't hold runnin' water back with yo' naked hand. You got to let it keep on runnin' till it finds a place to settle, then it will rest still. It ain't only Crystal, it's you and it's me too. We stopped together one time, den we started movin' again. You an' Victoria, an' me with Oliver an' Patrick dem cause I didn't care which way I went. An' I's still movin'. I don't know where it'll carry me. All I know is dat somethin' keeps tellin' me to stay free, and keep goin', and dat when de time comes to rest still I'll know it."

Adam's hand dropped lightly on one of hers. "You an' me again, Rhoda," he whispered.

"No," she said firmly. "Not now. Maybe never. I's still restless. I still got to move."

She was silent a moment, and when she spoke there was a note of maternal solicitude in her voice.

"Dat poor chile, Esther," she said. "She don't give you ease in yo' loneliness."

"How you know?" Adam gasped in amazement.

"She come cryin' to me dat night," Rhoda told him softly. "Her ma's dead, an' she was scared. An' I took her in my bed till mornin', then I told her to give thanks, that you was kinder dan most men, an' she went back home." She paused a moment, then returned to her question:

"She don't give you ease?"

"No," Adam almost shouted, despising not only his big, lustful body, but the importunate flesh of all men. "No, she give me only sadness, and my hand will never touch her again."

She regarded him compassionately.

"You see," she explained, "you's still movin' too. You an' me an' Crystal, an' not one can help the other. We all got to travel alone."

"But Crystal is yo' chile," Adam urged.

"No," Rhode answered sadly. "I borned a child into dis world here at Martha's Haven. An' den a new world came, an' she grew up in it. It ain't mine, but it's hers. I'd get lost in it tomorrow, but maybe she can find her own way about. If it ever falls down an' hurts she, I guess I goin' to be right here, tryin' to hold mine together for she to

come back to. Dat's all I can do. An' my gal knows dat. I ain't got to follow she around singin' it."

They sat on for a moment of silence, then Rhoda said:

"We'll go in tomorrow night to hear she sing. Treasure can stay an' mind de boys, an' go with some of de village gals next night. But you an' me, Adam, we got to be there the first time."

"I wasn't goin' at all," Adam said sadly, "after she shamed me in front of everybody, at Mr. Chris's store. I thought she wouldn't care if I was there or not. An' besides, seeing that redheaded Patrick Sullivan all dressed up an' struttin' around is more dan my belly can stand."

"Well, we's going," Rhoda said with finality. "She'll know if we's there, an' she'll care, an' besides I want to see de show."

All day the square had been closed to the public, and had been swarming like an anthill with preparations for the première. Before sunset the crowds started to gather and press against the ropes, and when the brief twilight descended the barriers were removed and they poured across the grass, filled the stands that had been erected

for the occasion, and overflowed into every available nook and corner.

Rhoda and Adam were among the first to be admitted, and they secured good seats on the second row. About them was much good-natured jostling. Greetings flashed back and forth as the people found and occupied seats. Excitement and laughter were in the air, and it was impossible to escape the contagion. Rhoda succumbed to it first, and in the deepening dusk Adam saw the flash of her fine teeth, and in her face the blurring and softening of the cynical lines that maturity had etched, until, peering through the half-light, he saw beside him the face of Treasure, open and childlike, and not the face of the woman whom he had found upon his return to St. Croix.

"You glad you come now, ain't it?" she asked.

He nodded, grinning sheepishly, and she said in a wondering voice:

"All dem people come to see our Crystal. Dat's somethin', Adam. Dat's somethin' to talk about. Look," she said, "dere's hundreds an' hundreds."

It was true; far back under the trees, row after row of dark faces melting into shadow and revealing themselves in occasional high lights from flash-



ing teeth and laughing eyes. And down near the water, to the right, the white colony, in its immaculate linens and muslins, concentrating within itself the last vestiges of the day, and in contrast with the breathing darkness banked behind them seeming strangely imponderable, and other-worldly.

Out beyond the breakwater glimmered the familiar pattern of the harbor, with Protestant Cay rising in the foreground and the channel lights flashing redly on the way to open water.

Then suddenly there was light. Massed "floods" concealed in trees, and in the screens of greenery that had been built to mask the wings, blotted out the familiar and beat down upon the stage, endowing its world with reality, and from a grove of transplanted palms the band crashed full volume into a rollicking Gilbert and Sullivan prelude.

Adam and Rhoda found themselves looking upon the deck of a ship moored against the breakwater. There was much gay bunting in evidence. A lanyard of signal flags stirred in the gentle breeze, and a huge Union Jack drooped from the rail over the waters of the bay. Upon the deck,

and clad in sailor suits, a male chorus swabbed the planking with large mops, and while they worked they sang:

“We sail the ocean blue,  
And our saucy ship’s a beauty!  
We’re sober men, and true, and attentive to  
our duty.  
When the balls whistle free o’er the bright blue  
sea,  
We stand to our guns all day;  
When at anchor we ride on the Portsmouth tide,  
We have plenty of time for play.  
Ahoy, ahoy, ahoy, ahoy.”

They dropped their mops and executed a horn-pipe to the um-pah, um-pah of the band, then they were back at the mopping, and singing with renewed gusto.

From the moment that the “floods” went on, the audience sat entranced. With the rapt faces of children they leaned forward and with their brothers and sisters and cousins and aunts upon the stage entered an enchanting and completely credible land of make-believe. To them there was

nothing incongruous about a black-faced British tar dancing a hornpipe on a Caribbean beach which he called a Portsmouth tide. Nor was comedy inherent in a diction in which the careful phrasing of a professional director served merely as a framework for the syncopated rhythm of African speech. In an instant a dramatic convention had been established and accepted. In the intensely real world of unreality to which they had been admitted, Britons were black. It had never occurred to the players to question the fact, and with complete sincerity they threw themselves into the parts, projecting beyond the footlights that spell which can be cast only by the untutored who believe without question or by the great actor who can consciously dissemble.

The sailors finished their song and formed in a straight line. A spontaneous burst of applause lifted, then broke abruptly into silence as a figure stepped from the wings and in a hesitant voice proclaimed:

“Hail, men-o’-wars men—safeguards of your  
nation,  
Here is an end, at last, of all privation . . .”

From Rhoda in a loud ecstatic voice burst:  
“Great Gawd, Adam—dat’s Crystal, ain’t it?”

“Hush,” cautioned Adam, “everybody’ll hear you.”

“I don’t care if dey do. Ain’t I her ma?” Rhoda announced, and turned to exult into the faces of the people behind her.

But now Crystal was closing her salutation, and advancing downstage toward the audience.

An encouraging flutter of applause met her halfway and gave her the confidence she needed. She lifted her head and in a clear, untrained soprano began:

“For I’m called Little Buttercup, dear Little  
Buttercup,  
Though I could never tell why,  
But still I’m called Buttercup, poor Little  
Buttercup,  
Sweet little Buttercup, I.”

She was dressed, Rhoda now saw, in a short full skirt of some light flowered stuff that came to her knees, a closely fitting bodice and a pink bon-

net with a wide brim and roses that nodded entrancingly as she moved, and on her arm she carried a basket. But there was color on her dark cheeks and her mouth was carmine, and she moved with the untamed grace of a jungle cat. As she lost herself in her singing, her carefully schooled English went to pieces under the resurgence of her childhood Crucian, the pretty British clothes and nodding roses, and the familiar measures of England's adored Sir Arthur, became merely accessories of a barbaric improvisation that was neither Africa nor Albion, but a fantastic fusion of the two.

"I've snuff, and tobaccy, and excellent jacky"

she sang as she danced from one sailor to another, exhibiting her wares.

"Sailors should never be shy;

"So buy of your Buttercup—poor Little Buttercup,

Come, of your Buttercup buy!"

The applause was still sounding when the

Boatswain stepped forward and addressed her jovially:

“Ay, little Buttercup—and well called—for you’re the rosiest, the roundest, and the reddest beauty in all Spithead.”

And from the lips of Africa came the incredible reply:

“Red, am I? and round—and rosy! Maybe, for I have dissembled well!”

And who shall say that she was not all of these things? For on a West Indian beach that night there were hundreds who accepted the announcement with wide-eyed credence, then gave it their confirmation in thunderous applause.

From the close of Crystal’s first number to the final chorus Rhoda and Adam were transported. Unconsciously they found each other’s hands, and they sat forward while color and music and movement swept them with intoxicating waves. They felt the performance not as a succession of integrated parts, but as a continuous flow from which nothing emerged in sharp definition but the moments when Crystal appeared and sensation became almost unendurable in its intensity. Those moments—and to Adam the unpleasant shock of

Sullivan's appearance, in the overpowering trappings of Sir Joseph Porter, very cocksure of himself and, with his light complexion, reddish hair, and Gaelic manner, so nearly a Briton as to seem to him utterly false to the spirit of the play.

And then before they realized it the finale waked the echoes with its resounding chorus, the lights went off, momentarily, then flooded back for the players to take their bows. While the audience clapped, stamped, and shouted their approval, parents and relatives crowded forward and an impromptu reception upon the stage ensued. Adam and Rhoda were on their feet and pressing forward with the others. They had started under a purely instinctive compulsion to see their child, but when they found themselves under the glare of the lights, with well-dressed townsfolk about them, and circulating among these gaily costumed players, they werewhelmed with shyness and drew back until their retreat was stayed by the wall of a deckhouse at the extreme left of the stage. Adam was acutely conscious of his plain drill pants and jumper, and the large palm hat which, like all the countryfolk, he had worn to protect his head from the dreaded dew-damp, while Rhoda was self-



consciously smoothing imaginary wrinkles from her simple dress of cotton print. Then as by a common instinct they drew together until their shoulders touched, and their bodies stiffened into rigid and artificial attitudes. Crystal was approaching, and as though that fact were not of itself sufficiently overwhelming, she was leading the white director by the hand, laughing gaily, and bearing directly down upon them. A moment later she had kissed them both effusively and was presenting her companion.

"Mr. Wineblow," she said in a voice that seemed to have grown richer and more vibrant than they remembered, "I want you to know my dear old mother and father. They have come all the way in from the farm to hear me sing. Wasn't that lovely of them!"

The director extended his hand and with a visible effort Adam broke his rigid pose and clasped it. He could think of nothing to say, and this was strange, for he had never been self-conscious with white men. They had always seemed to understand each other—Mr. Fred, Mr. Lyndall—men like that. He felt the inadequacy of his silence, and since he had no words to express his cordiality

he closed his huge fist in a fervent grip. Mr. Wine-blow flinched and withdrew his wounded member, then he presented it gingerly to Rhoda. Her face was quick with compassion, her embarrassment vanished. Taking his hand gently in one of hers she stroked it soothingly with the other, and smiled into his anguished face.

"Please forgive Adam," she begged. "He don't mean no harm. Dat's just his way of sayin' thank you for all you done for Crystal."

Her patient forgot his pain and beamed at her through his spectacles. "You liked her, then, and you really liked the show?" he asked eagerly.

Rhoda said in a hushed voice, "It been so wonderful. I couldn't believe it's Crystal. It been so wonderful."

The director laughed. "No, it wasn't wonderful. As a matter of fact, it was completely cockeyed, but it did come off, didn't it? That's the amazing thing about the Negro. No matter how fantastic an idea is he can make you believe it." He turned to Crystal and dropped a hand on her shoulder. "Here's one thing it did, anyway. It showed that your girl has talent. If she has half a chance she'll go places. You can bet on that."

"Go places?" enquired Rhoda, at once suspicious. "My gal don't need to go anywhere, she can stay right here in St. Croix."

Crystal and the director laughed, and Crystal said, "That don't mean anything, ma. It's just an American saying."

Mr. Ainman and Mr. Lyndall came up, shook hands with the director and congratulated him upon the success of the opera. Then they turned to Adam and Rhoda.

"I see you have been working more miracles, Adam," Mr. Fred said, laughing. "You have raised an opera star in Martha's Haven; that's more than I could do." He extended his hand to Crystal. "We're proud of you," he said. "When are you coming back home?"

A shadow flitted across Crystal's face, then was replaced by her best Buttercup smile.

"Soon as the play's over," she lilted. "Can't get along without my old mother and dad, you know."

Everyone beamed upon her, and in that moment Rhoda's face was beautiful. But Adam looked skeptical and held aloof. Then Sullivan, with his easy assurance, joined the party.

Seen now at close range it was obvious that he was suffering acute discomfort in his heavily padded woolen coat, for his face streamed with sweat. But it was equally evident that he could not bring himself to part with all that breadth of shoulder and glory of epaulets and braid until everyone had been allowed to see and admire and envy. But Adam did not envy. While Sullivan was greeting Ainman and Lyndall with the proper shade of deference, being superior to Rhoda and easily familiar with the director, he noted behind the melting make-up the puffs of dissipation under the eyes, and the tired lines about the mouth, and he remembered that Sullivan was a year or two older than himself and had been riding hard for an early fall. And he didn't envy him for his flashy looks. Nor the money that he was reputed to have. Nor even, in that moment, very much for having briefly possessed Rhoda.

He was, in fact, beginning to feel superior to this glittering and shoddy being when Sullivan whispered a word in Crystal's ear. Crystal kissed Rhoda, leaving a bright smear on her cheek, and called good-bye to Adam. Then she swayed toward Sullivan. He put his arm possessively about her

waist, mocked Adam with open laughter, and disappeared with her into the crowd.

The full moon cleared Mount Welcome.

A royal palm caught it, cut a black stencil into its heart, then released it to ride magnificently up the eastern heavens. Its light flooded down and stippled the bay with cold white fire, patterned the square in sharp whites and blacks, and streamed across the deck of H.M.S. *Pinafore*, making it suddenly incongruous and false, its glaring incandescence cheap and tawdry.

With an indefinable sense of somehow having been cheated Rhoda and Adam shouldered their way out of the crowd and started the long walk to Martha's Haven.

They settled into the stride peculiar to the people of the island—feet holding the ground close, reaching far. Whole body moving, keeping weight in perfect balance, swinging it lightly forward mile on mile. They were off the pavements now and free of walls, and their gaze could follow where the open country led it out in uninterrupted flight until it met the sea. Over their heads the familiar constellations wheeled westward.

Earth smells sharpened by the dew filled their nostrils, and from a neighboring canebrake sounded the insistent boom-boom-boom of a nocturnal chorus.

In the tricky moonlight the two marchers seemed to change by imperceptible degrees. The square, powerful figure of the man straightened and took on stature, his long arms swung free, and his stride lengthened. The woman's carriage became more buoyant, and effortlessly her stride conformed to that of the man.

They had nearly reached home before she broke the silence.

"You hear what Crystal say?" she asked, and in the half-light Adam saw that her eyes were shining. "She say she comin' home again soon as de show's over."

Adam stopped and looked into her face. He started to say something, thought better of it, and finally admitted briefly:

"Yes, I hear."

A week later news reached Martha's Haven that Crystal had sailed for New York. Adam went to town to find out what he could. From Rachel he

learned that Sullivan had paid her passage and had gone on the same ship. He had to come home and tell Rhoda that. And he had to tell her that she had not even left a note of good-bye—not even a message. While he talked, Rhoda watched him with the hard bitter look she had worn when he had first returned to St. Croix. And when he finished, she said:

“Like father, like daughter. When dey’s through dey travels, an’ dey leaves you nothin’, not even good-bye.”







PART FIVE





WORD CAME down from high heaven, transmitted through Oliver, who had established himself in the minds of the Negroes as Gabriel to Noodeal, that the time had arrived when everyone should be happy. Obviously a people who had been snatched from starvation and fed, who had been found naked and were clothed, should be led in song, instructed in the more decorous forms of the dance, initiated into the subtleties of historical pageanty, and allowed to taste the aesthetic delights of opera and the drama so that they may have access to proper media through which to express their gratitude. It was also appropriate that they should be gathered in confined and torrid spaces, observe the astounding gymnastics of a song leader, and pour forth their thanks in programs of popular airs, which opened with "Amer-

ica" and closed with "The Star-Spangled Banner." It was then promised that upon special occasions Noodeal would appear in the flesh to see how his children were progressing in the arts of expression, and then they were to be prepared to flutter their white linen handkerchiefs, emit three cheers, and smile alltogethernow up at the platform.

It was all very educational, and the Negroes were quick to grasp and apply the lessons of their great new democracy. They learned, in short, that there are sweeter ways of earning a living than by chopping cane under a tropic sun, and in the first flush of the discoverey they applied themselves assiduously to the lighter tasks. It was not uncommon at that time to see a group of countryfolk plodding along a dusty road meet an official car and break shrilly into "America," execute a gay terpsichorean caper or two, and laugh with masterful lightheartedness into the dust cloud with which the vehicle shrouded itself.

The contagion of happiness spread. It became a cult. It poured like treacle into every public gathering. The band and the opera, which had been mere forerunners, were lost in the procession that had now caught up with them.

Supplication Day arrived, July 27th—the most solemn date of the Crucian's calendar, for this was the beginning of the hurricane season, and in accordance with ancient island custom the people filled the churches to pray for divine protection. It had always been a time for lugubrious wagging of heads, for dark forebodings, and the retelling by the older people of earlier visitations with their toll of dead, of wasted field and ruined houses.

The elders were out betimes and, encouraged by a faint haze over the early sun and a strengthening trade wind, looked forward to a day of uninterrupted reminiscence and fervid supplications, the whole tintured fittingly with gloom. But no sooner had the beards commenced to wag than the churches were invaded by the forces of joy, and gloom foundered miserably in a sea of ineffable optimism.

In the street before the Reformed Church Oliver stopped a group of young people, reminded them of the solemnity of the occasion, and urged them to enter and supplicate. The sentiment of the group was appropriately interpreted by a young girl in an evening dress and bare feet, car-

rying a pair of white shoes in her hand. She tossed him a ripple of laughter, executed a step from the Charleston, which had just reached the island from the mainland via Puerto Rico, and, snapping her fingers, airily, told him that if the hurricane blew away her mama's cabin Noodeal would give her a detachable bungalow like the one he was living in, so what the hell!

The plan was such a sound one, so far-reaching in its potentialities, and so definitely aligned on the side of the angels, that once it was bruited about there were many who claimed authorship. But there is good reason to believe that it had sprung from the acquisitive genius of the man who had most to gain by its successful consummation, and that man was Oliver. At any rate, he was the promoter, and to it he gave his all.

The steps that led to it were logical and consistent with the new philosophy. If a people with too much time on their hands grew restive, they should be led in song; if song proved inadequate, band concerts, classes in handicraft, the Messrs. Gilbert and Sullivan, were flung into the breach. But when all else failed, when the forces of civili-



zation stood with their backs to the last barricade, there was still—the monster parade. But this last resource was not to be lightly squandered. It was to be held in reserve for an occasion of such magnitude that it might be said to approximate a “cause.” And Oliver had the cause.

Conferences between church, state, and outstanding leaders of the people ensued, and then the island rocked with the announcement. There would be a monster parade for the married, participation open only to those respectable members of the community who were provided with proper credentials, and only those, with their wives and children, were to be permitted to march and share in the ensuing festivities. Thereafter, it was further intimated, the island of St. Croix would take its place among the socially enlightened of the world. Society would be quite properly divided into two sharply defined groups: the married and respectable at the top, the unmarried and outcast on the bottom. The second category did not refer to virgins, Oliver elaborately explained, since virginity was always admirable and worthy of respect, even in a bastard. Nor did it refer to men, since even in the States, he had been given to under-

stand, man was by nature a rover. No, it was the unmarried mother, especially the brazen type of hussy who went around boasting about it, that St. Croix would have no room for in the future.

News of the approaching campaign reached Martha's Haven in due time, Adam picking it up in the village and bringing it to Rhoda at supper-time. To his mind the idea was so preposterous that he thought it a great joke, and was inclined to poke fun at her about it. He saved it until they were all seated at table, thinking that it would give them a merry meal. Treasure was opposite him, sitting between Ramsay MacDonald and Patrick, tending them with an unconscious and touching maternal solicitude. At the foot of the table Rhoda sat, with Hoover in her arms, feeding him from the fungee bowl with a large spoon. She always did this, not because he wasn't big enough to feed himself, she said, but because if turned loose with a spoon he'd clean the pot by himself and let everybody else go hungry.

"Yo' friend Oliver sure goin' get you dis time," Adam grinned at her. "I done tell you when you broke up his American hat you wasn't through with him." Then he went ahead and told her of

the projected parade. Between his absorption in the good food that she had set before him and his mischievous enjoyment of the story, he failed to notice the effect that it produced. She sat listening in silence, the spoon poised halfway between the bowl and Hoover's mouth, but one by one the children sensed it, grew restive, and watched her with eyes in which fascinated anticipation gave place to fright. Then Hoover screamed, dropped to the floor, and scuttled under the table. Patrick, sobbing wildly, threw his arms around Treasure's neck, while Ramsay MacDonald slipped from his chair and started around the table to his father, yelping shrilly as he traveled.

Ignoring the clamor, of which indeed she was probably unconscious, and speaking not in anger but in a tone of iron conviction, Rhoda raised her voice. "Adam," she said, "I goin' to have to run dat fat hypocrite off this island. If he stay around here an' keep this up, I'll kill him, and that'll mean trouble for everybody, me an' you an' the chillen. But first I got to humble he spirit, otherwise runnin' won't do no good."

Treasure asked, "Why you don't put de obeah on him, ma?"

"Dat's been tried, chile," Rhoda informed her. "It's been tried an' it didn't work. He found a obeah doll under his doorstep after he put up dat sign about fornication, an' what you think he do? Why, he throw it in the big road, an' most kill heself laughin'. He say he got both Jesus *and* Noodeal in he corner now, an' ain't no obeah can touch him."

She fell silent a moment, and the others watched her face while she groped with the vast abstraction that loomed behind her enemy, trying to get her hands on it and fit it into words. "I got to show de people he's wrong," she said at last, pondering her words and speaking them slowly as she found them. "They's tryin' to make us look dirty inside when we knows we's clean. Dat might be all right where Noodeal come from, but it ain't right for St. Croix. We got to get dat straight, den we got to run Oliver off de island."

She sat a moment longer, elbows on table and face buried in her hands, while the others watched her and waited. Then with a decisive movement she got to her feet, looming tall and straight and looking down at them.

"Adam," she said, "I got to count on you an'

Treasure now to take care of de house an' look after de chillen. I got work to do, an' I's late gettin' started. I know Oliver's got Noodeal in he corner, but I ain't so sure about Jesus. Anyhow, come tomorrow sunrise I goin' to be gone from here far an' wide as de island'll take me. I got somethin' to do now with these here hands—I got a fight what's goin' to be a *fight*, an' it time I was gettin' started."

Great days for Oliver! The parade of the married only a fortnight away, and in the island's two towns his name on every tongue. Someday, in some forgotten village among the islands, an old black man with an absurdly pompous manner and narrow venal eyes will seize the unwary listener and with a facility born of endless repetitions recount each moment to him. And his stories will not be believed. Yet they are true—as true, and almost as improbable, as the stories that might have been told by another great opportunist on a lonely night to a guard, on an island called Elba.

Oliver exploded the fallacy that matter cannot occupy two different places at the same time, for he seemed to be everywhere at once. One moment, with furrowed brow and impressively nodding

head, he would be seen in weighty conference with the parish priest, and the next at his church door welcoming a pair of converts to respectability. For now, with the town talking of nothing but the parade and the promise of greater, if vaguer, blessings to follow, the marriage mill was whirring busily.

Under his hand committees of ladies blossomed as though by magic and, flaunting badges appropriately inscribed, proceeded about the innumerable preparations. There was a committee on recruits headed by Oliver's wife, who was still spoken of generally as the Widow Hester. There were committees on music, collation, time of march, and decorations, and upon the ribbons of one group of ladies appeared the surprising words "Daughters of Joy." No one knew what they meant, nor how the committee was to function. The ribbons had mysteriously come that way from the States, and there were eight young ladies left over who had to be taken care of.

This got the bandmaster into trouble too. As he stepped from his stand after a weekly concert he found himself surrounded by the committee, and before he could control himself he had



emitted what was later described as a burst of coarse, insulting Irish laughter. A report was duly made to the authorities, and he had evidently been the recipient of a merited rebuke. For when the afternoon of the concert came around again he spoke of the young ladies in the highest terms. Then he topped his speech off with the prettiest compliment of all. He said that he had expected to be received by such a committee only upon entering heaven, and that the shock of meeting them suddenly had been too much for his nerves.

All went well until four days before the date set for the great event. It is a fact that need not be stressed that of all the varied activities attendant upon the great occasion the one closest to Oliver's heart was the marriage mill. Not a couple passed through that hospitable gate into the respectable beyond but left Oliver the richer by forty cents. But now inexplicably, when the imminence of the reward should have accelerated the movement into a veritable stampede, business commenced to slacken. The committee on recruits, augmented to a flying squadron under the widow's guidance, commenced to meet with unaccountable resistance. The city, she reported, she could count on,



but once beyond the boundaries the country folk met her with the noncommittal blankness usually reserved for inquisitive white people. Rumors aplenty were abroad but there was nothing you could put your finger on. And in the meantime the business folded up completely. It was now two days since the church doors had even been opened. Oliver was frantic, and summoned all his committees in secret conclave.

For a time Martha's Haven had seen little of Rhoda. And this was strange, for it was the season of the year when, during the heat of the day, it was the custom of the countryfolk to remain at home, to find what shade they could and take their ease. The steady pressure of the trade winds, which during the remainder of the year brought a blessed coolness, had failed. Each day the sun burned its way across the sky, either dispersing altogether the wraiths of mist that night had gathered upon the land or, condensing them into meaningless small clouds, herded them before it to be consumed in the stupendous conflagration of the sunset. It sucked the moisture from the vegetation, lowering the color tone of the whole

landscape until by imperceptible degree the brilliant green faded out and bronze predominated, and the shadows were brassy-yellow instead of blue. The voice of the land itself seemed to change under the waves of heat. In the thickets and cane fields a lush whispering gave place to an intermittent metallic rustling. Frogs were silent, and cicadas drilled monotonously through the heat. Travel on the paved highways was not bad, but on the side roads the dust was appalling, and it took a stout heart to negotiate them afoot during the torrid hours of midday.

Each morning while it was still dark Rhoda would start stirring about the cabin. She would breakfast, and on some days she would prepare a simple lunch which she would carry tied in a handkerchief suspended from her belt. She would stand a moment in the open door, pulling her full skirt up through the belt and looping it about her hips. This left her legs bare almost to the knees, and free for walking. When she was ready she would square her shoulders, say, "Well, I's on my way," and stride off into the dawn. At nightfall she would return, so tired that for the first time in her life she allowed Adam and Treasure

to put her into bed and get her supper. There were several nights when she did not return at all, and when on the ensuing evening she appeared she would casually let fall the names Fanny's Fancy and All-for-the-better, estates lying at the far eastern end of the island—places which none of them had ever seen and so could not visualize. She did not take them into her confidence, but Adam felt that this was a result of her natural disinclination to talk, coupled with her exhaustion when at home, instead of any deliberate exclusion of them from her thoughts. In fact, as the time passed, she would let fall remarks which implied that they were familiar with basic details. Once she said, as she came striding into the cabin, her eyes bright with triumph, "I got de judge today, Adam—what you think of dat!" Then, once started, she elaborated. "Funny I didn't think of he before. He know us people. He been here nailin' babies on dese mens an' looking out for us women befo' Noodeal was born. He say long as we stan' by de unmarried law, an' Noodeal leave him be, he'll stan' by us. An' what's more he goin' talk to de big white doctor."

Two days later she announced the capture of

the doctor, and, if not open approval, at least the tacit good will of Mr. Lyndall, whose homesteading efforts among the people had given him understanding of their problems.

During these days Adam was happier than he had been since he landed on St. Croix. He was taking care of Rhoda again, and she was depending on him to see that everything went well at home. He would take the three boys to the beach every morning where he was tinkering with his sloop, and entertain them while he calked the seams and poured hot pitch on the tightly packed oakum. Then when the sloop was afloat he tumbled them all into the bottom and took them fishing. Once when Rhoda came in dog tired and he had a plate of fried fish ready to hand her, she emerged from her habitual absorption in her great schemes and smiled up at him with a flash of her old tenderness. "Adam," she said, "you is a good boy, an' God knows dat's de truth. If dere's a man livin' what could make a fool out o' me two times, I guess it might be you." She lifted a piece of fish and took a bite, relished it heartily for a moment, then let him down with, "But thank Gawd dere ain't no such man livin'."

Another time she asked triumphantly, "What I tell you, Adam, ain't I say I ain't so sure Oliver got Jesus in he corner? Well, today I have talk with de priest. Not de Reform' Church preacher, but Father duPre, de one what writes books, an' in de hot summertime takes off dat high collar an' walks all around like a natchell man. You 'member he, ain't you?"

Adam gasped. "My Gawd, Rhoda, you gone right up an' talk to he?"

"Sure," she answered nonchalantly. "I got my work to do."

"An' what he say?"

"Well, he walk up to de words, an' he mos' had he han' on 'em. Den he turn roun' an' ain't speak 'em out. But he pat me on de shoulder an' tell me he don't believe Jesus is with Oliver any more dan me, an' if I get in trouble call on he."

"Rhoda," Adam said in an aggrieved voice, "you know you ain't tell me an' Treasure nothin'. Dere's all sorts of talk an' I can't say yes or no. Why you ain't tell us?"

She looked from one to the other in surprise. "I thought I done told you," she exclaimed. "Well, den, come out here in de night-cool."

They seated themselves on the doorstep, and an air that was not yet a breeze but cool from the sea lifted to them. Then Rhoda leaned forward and said, "Now listen."

She talked for fifteen minutes without stopping. That in itself was amazing, but infinitely less astonishing than the audacious thing she had planned. From the deep shadows under the bananas the shade of Jeanne d'Arc might well have been signaling her approval—and that of Sylvia Pankhurst and Lucy Stone and all the other women who have followed visions and confounded men, for Rhoda was of their dauntless company.

When she had finished, Treasure said in an awed voice, "Ma, I just can't believe it's you." But Adam did not say. He sat silent for a moment, then suddenly he reached within the cabin door and brought out his guitar. In violence he fell upon the instrument, playing no air, but tearing from it passionate chords to throb one after another up and up until the night rang with his triumphant paean.

The night before the parade the drought was broken. A charitable wind out of the southeast had



collected the cloudcaps from several of the mountainous islands, swept them together into a respectable thundersquall, and sent it rumbling and flashing across the Caribbean in the direction of St. Croix. It struck at midnight and swept the island with a rush of cold, revivifying cleanness. From the villages rose the grateful sound of water tumbling into stagnant cisterns, and the contented gutturals of fowl as they tightened grips on perches and tree limbs and took the water through dusty feathers. Across the arid fields and stifling highways marched the rain, brimming the guts with yellow water that rushed seaward from every watershed. And simultaneously, as though they had long awaited a prearranged signal, the frogs took the field with a mighty shout and utterly vanquished the cicadas.

By morning the purge had been completed, the squall had gone banging away in the direction of Jamaica, and St. Croix lifted from the Caribbean to glitter like a new-cut diamond in the young sunlight.

In the towns, the villages, and even the isolated cabins the people took their mood from the day. Greetings were called as far as the voice would



carry. Old grudges and smoldering hatreds that had grown strong on the heat shrank to a vanishing point in the general atmosphere of thanksgiving and relief.

Rhoda was up betimes. She called Treasure, and filling two washtubs from the brimming cistern, the women bathed and slipped into their chemises. Then from the cabin came a chorus of shrill protests, lost almost immediately in loud splashing sounds, as one by one the boys were snatched from sleep, immersed, and scrubbed vigorously.

Breakfast was a simple affair. The pot was still half-full of last night's fungee, composed of relief corned beef and meal, and Rhoda sliced the jellied mass into strips and threw a handful of bananas on the table. When the children were stuffed, Treasure removed the evidences in a final scrubbing and brought them to Rhoda.

Now the proceedings assumed a mysterious, almost a ritualistic aspect. Rhoda retired to the shadowy corner behind the charcoal stove, and from a crevice in the masonry produced a key. With this she unlocked a massive chest made of undressed mahogany planking and removed a lot

of starched white linen clothing. Then she shook out and arranged upon the bed two dresses and three children's shirts.

"But, mamma," Treasure cried, "we ain't goin' to town in dem ole-fashion' cloes, is we?"

"Yes, chile," Rhoda responded. "You an' me an' plenty of others. We ain't goin' to have on one stitch Noodeal give us. We ain't goin' to be nothin' today but St. Croix."

Her glance picked up the row of store shirts and diminutive pants that had been issued for her children, and which Treasure had got ready for them to don.

"Put dem two-leg pants away," she ordered, "an' get my chillen into shirts, an' you yo'self put on dat dress an' a headkerchief an' make tracks—time's passin'."

"Ma," called Treasure presently, when she had got them dressed, "look here, dese chillen is grow, an' de shirts ain't. Dem ain't modes'."

Rhoda turned from her own toilette and examined the three solemn little figures ranged for her inspection. Yes, time had passed. The evidence was conclusive. But she was in no mood to be daunted by the conventions.

"It don't matter with boys nohow, even if dey shirts is short," she announced, "an' besides ain't one of dem got anything to be ashamed of."

Her glance rested proudly first on Hoover, then Patrick, and lastly on Adam's boy, and she broke into an irrepressible chuckle. "Ramsay MacDonald, chile," she exclaimed, "you ain't nobody's beauty, but you ain't never goin' hungry, 'cause you sho' does take after yo' pa."

A few minutes later, Adam, coming up the hill, looked up and saw Rhoda waiting for him in the doorway, and the sight brought him up standing. The miles she had traveled under the punishing blows of the sun, the sweating and the worry, had taken every ounce of fat off her, and the clean, bracing morning had flowed into her, restoring her vitality. Her dress he remembered well, with its close bodice that brought out the modeling of her strong torso, and the full skirt that fell to her ankles and always billowed about her as she walked. Her headkerchief, he noticed, was red and was worn Martinique fashion, with the ends tied at the top and standing alert like rabbits' ears. It gave her the jaunty, devil-may-care air that in the

the old days had always characterized her on festive occasions.

"Don't look at me," she cried, "look at de sky. Ain't I tell you, Gawd is in we corner."

Then when he stared obediently up into the shimmering expanse, she called, "Don't stan' dere moonin'. Step lively. We's about to march."

The parade of the married was scheduled to start at ten o'clock, and at eight Rhoda closed the cabin and they started for town. She took the trail first, with Hoover in her arms, followed by Treasure carrying Patrick, and Adam brought up the rear with Ramsay MacDonald perched upon a shoulder.

When they reached the highway they found about fifty of their neighbors assembled before Mr. Chris's store. The moment these sighted Rhoda they set up a lusty cheering, and a ten-piece scratchy band started to beat out a raucous rhythm. This was promptly augmented by thumpings on tin pans, the banging together of large gourds, and the striking of pieces of iron suspended from strings, until the valley re-echoed to

the unholy din. Gradually the shrill rasping of the scratchies dominated the chaos of sound and established a pattern for a simple but sharply defined marching rhythm. Then, with Rhoda at their head, they started for town.

At every crossroad or footpath they were joined by groups from the estate villages, men, women, and especially children. The women were attired for the most part like Rhoda, in the traditional costume of the islands, their bare splay feet scuffing softly on the new cement, appearing and disappearing beneath the loose, billowing skirts. Some wore headkerchiefs, some broad-brimmed, floppy palm hats, and some walked bareheaded. But the latest millinery models from the mainland were noticeably absent.

There was no attempt at organization. From edge to edge the new ribbon of glaring concrete that wound away over the hills to Christiansted was filled with humanity. Accretions that awaited them along the way fell in at the tail as they passed, bringing babes in arms, innumerable small, white-shirted children who trailed beside their elders with determined fists attached to skirt or trouser

leg, and a chorus of ecstatic mongrel dogs in extraordinarily good voice and determined to do their part in the general pandemonium.

And now, still a mile from town, and already with a sufficient following to assure a successful demonstration, the spirits of the marchers, already high, soared. Beside the road long stretches of the flamboyant tree, that one would have passed unnoticed only yesterday under their shrouds of dust, and with their blooming retarded by the drought, blazed out in scarlet flame against the blue of sky or sea. To right and left the pasture fences were disappearing under the swarming tendrils of the yellow jasmine, and everywhere the wild poinsettia starred the wayside weeds with crimson.

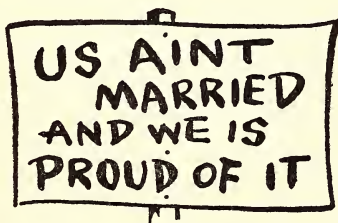
And through this riot of raw, eye-smiting color, to a cacophony of noise that might well have jarred the walls of Jericho, Rhoda led her army. It wasn't turning out as she had planned, but she knew instinctively that they would carry the day. The militancy born of anger and outraged pride that she had felt and had transmitted to her recruits during the scorching days of her campaign had changed overnight into an uncontrollable exuberance of spirits. She had girded her loins for a



battle, and a thunderstorm had turned the occasion into a carnival. She must have felt this, for suddenly she brought her hand down upon her thigh and exclaimed to the woman next to her:

"Sister, this ain't goin' to be no fight. It's goin' to be better than dat. By sundown we's goin' to laugh dat fat hypocrite Oliver plumb off dis island. You wait an' see."

When they entered the suburbs they were joined by reinforcements from town, accompanied by a second scratchy band and bearing aloft the battle flag of the crusade. This consisted of a large square signboard carried upon a pole, and it read:



When this took its place at the head of the column the excitement exceeded all bounds, and Rhoda and her lieutenants had difficulty in restraining some of the more jubilant marchers from racing ahead of the procession in the direction of



the Market Square. She had her plans carefully timed so as to reach the bandstand at exactly the right moment, and she was too wise to allow her drama to be dissipated by a premature arrival.

Oliver, in the meantime, was experiencing unexpected difficulties. Surrounded by his marshals and assisted by the various beribboned committees, he was in process of organizing his line of march on a street adjacent to the square. His plan was a simple one and befitting the dignity of the occasion. It was proposed that when they were assembled the band would take its place at their head and they would proceed the few blocks to the square. There they would dispose themselves comfortably upon the benches, cool themselves with souvenir fans promised for the occasion, enjoy a few musical selections, and receive in respectful silence messages from certain outstanding exponents of the institution which it was their privilege to celebrate. Following the exercises, all would adjourn to a warehouse on the water front which served the public as a community center and had been converted into a banquet hall for the occasion, and there the collation would be served.

After the hour of refreshment and relaxation, it was proposed that a permanent organization be formed looking to the ultimate complete moral regeneration of the island.

It was all in the best tradition. It had the sanction of church and state, and it was characterized by the restraint and good taste one would naturally expect to find in the class of society from which it drew its strength. And yet to Oliver it seemed that misfortune had dogged his steps. Not only had the number of actual marriages been disappointing, but couples who had signified their intention of marching had failed to appear at the appointed place. Rumors of Rhoda's activities had, of course, reached him. But these he had dismissed with the contempt which he felt they deserved. A certain amount of disorder might be expected from the rough element in the community, but with proper police protection they could be easily kept within bounds.

When he finally got his column formed he was dismayed to find how small it was. He could have sworn that many more had arrived than now stood waiting to march. Then even as he looked back a small, breathless black boy reached up to whisper

into the ear of a marcher, and the latter, taking his wife by the arm and reaching for his child, cast a furtive glance about him and slipped unobtrusively into the side street.

Then, for the first time, Oliver felt it in the air, and the skin on the back of his neck rippled and tautened in primal warning of approaching danger. He raised his head and listened, and down the cloudless sky came a faint but ominous sound not unlike that of an approaching hurricane.

Behind him he felt, rather than saw, his own forces waver, and rising to the emergency, but in a voice that betrayed his panic, he shouted the command to march.

The band crashed into "The Stars and Stripes Forever." His followers hesitated only imperceptibly, then stiffened, and squaring their shoulders stepped bravely forward.

At the exact moment that the black drum major, to whom the wily Irishman had resigned his position for the day, led his rearing trombones and resounding brasses into the square from the north, the forces of disorder surged forward from the south. In the center of the square stood the empty

bandstand, surrounded by its vacant benches, and from these outward to the boundaries of the square there was no movement, no sound. It was like the space at the center of a hurricane in which unnatural peace awaits annihilation at the hands of the million screaming devils surrounding it.

An abandoned newspaper lifted itself leisurely from one of the benches, executed a listless sara-band, and flattened itself against the railing of the stand. Overhead the leaves moved momentarily, then lapsed into immobility.

Then the annihilating forces swooped forward. From the very first the advantage was with Rhoda's cohorts, as it is inevitably in any situation where speed is essential and is purchasable only at the expense of dignity. Even had Oliver's forces taken the field aggressively, and won, they would have suffered moral defeat, for they would have proved merely that they were superior hooligans, and would have in no sense demonstrated the triumph of a higher civilization.

But they had no idea of entering into vulgar combat. Nor could they have done so, even if they had tried. For years before—an instrument in the hands of an inscrutable Destiny—the great John

Philip Sousa had determined the inexorable pace at which, on that particular and momentous day, the bandstand was to be approached. Once the march had started there was no turning to the right or the left, no deviation from the majestic tempo. At that preordained pace the twenty musicians would proceed in a forward direction and labor until the last note on the last page had been translated from mute symbol to brazen sound; then the inexorable hand of Destiny would drop them, and they would again become free agents.

But where dignity was concerned, Rhoda's army possessed the supreme advantage that rests with the fighter who has nothing to lose. With gleeful howls and whoops, dragging their ecstatic if unblest offspring with them, jostling and slapping convenient backs in a gale of high spirits, the unabashed children of nature swarmed into the square. Within an incredibly short space of time the benches were crowded with them, and standees packed themselves in behind them rank on rank.

The scratchies pre-empted the bandstand, and now for the first time raised above the heads of the mob, poured forth a torrent of sound that drowned all other noises. And this effect was at-

tained not only by volume, but by a tonal quality that seemed an emanation from the ground itself. It was the shrilling of the cicada, amplified a millionfold and broken into a rhythmic pattern, hypnotic yet madly stimulating in its effect. In contrast to it the arrogant blaring of the band seemed suddenly hollow and alien, and the uniformed musicians strangely out of place. But the months of drilling had done their work, and looking neither to right nor left they kept on coming. With the automatic precision of a robot the drum major went through his gyrations, and for a little while, in spite of the mounting din, the frustrated ghost of Mr. Sousa seemed to hover about the mouths of the brasses. But presently their advance brought them to the inner zone of sound—and then to the observer they appeared nothing more than a group of pantomimists, puffing out their cheeks and posturing with muted instruments.

When they had completed the march and lowered their instruments, the musicians found to their dismay that, while they had kept advancing until they were stopped by the outer ring of Rhoda's standees, they had not been followed into the square. The married folk had, upon finding



themselves in the open, deserted, and now formed a line along the north boundary, with a no-man's-land of grass between them and the successful invaders. But the young musicians had no time for alarm, for they were immediately made riotously welcome, and since it was obvious to anyone with half an eye that more fun was to be had among the rebels, they joined in the laughter at their own expense, turned their backs squarely on the beckoning gestures of respectability, and abandoned themselves to the spirit of the occasion.

Oliver meanwhile had run the few blocks to Government House to secure the aid of his influential friends and to enlist the strong arm of the law. There, to his consternation, he had discovered only a few colored clerical workers, who informed him that Noodeal had summoned the local staff to St. Thomas for a conference, and that Mr. Lyndall, the doctor, and their assistants were making an inspection trip in the country and would not return until evening.

At police headquarters a colored desk sergeant from the States deplored the absence of the chief of police and invited Oliver to air his troubles. But a recital of his difficulties brought only the



discomforting ruling that since the plaza and even the banquet hall were public property, and that since no permit had been obtained from the chief for private and exclusive use, they were obviously free to any member of the public who wished to avail himself of their facilities. "Of course," he concluded, "if there was any violence—"

Oliver had to admit that there was none.

"What's your complaint, then?"

"They make noise."

Since even at that distance the clamor made it necessary for them to raise their voices to be heard, the fact was self-evident.

The sergeant nodded. "What else?"

Then the accumulated humiliation and frustration of the day arose and burst from Oliver.

"They laugh!" he shouted. "An' they more than laugh—they ridicule. An' they more than ridicule—they ridicule me!"

To make a noise, to laugh, even to ridicule—these, Oliver was informed succinctly, were not only the prerogatives but the practices of the American citizen. They were, in fact, almost a prerequisite to citizenship. In conclusion, they were heartily recommended to Oliver for his personal

consideration, and with the utmost of official courtesy he was bowed out to the pavement in front of the office.

Thoroughly discouraged, Oliver returned to the square, only to find that matters had gone from bad to worse. His band, upon which he had counted heavily, had gone over to the enemy, and his forces were still further depleted by desertions. The loyal remnant had fallen back upon the ultimate weapon of the upper class, scorn. But since the techniques for conveying this emotion are limited, and are effective only upon those who have been made to understand their own inferiority, success was not noticeable. In fact, the attempt promoted such a barrage of catcalls, pointed fingers, and even grotesque impersonations of their betters that the effort soon collapsed, and the married folk, thoroughly discomfited, were casting about for a scapegoat when Oliver arrived.

He stood there perspiring, physically unable to shape the words that would confess his failure, and listened to epithets he could scarcely have believed utterable by his refined associates.

And then out of the darkness of his despair

flashed an inspiration. The plan unfolded complete in every detail. It was undoubtedly a divine revelation. Once again he was the authoritative leader, commanding of presence and to be depended upon in an emergency. He motioned the married folk about him and explained. The hoodlums could have the square. Respectable people had only to adjourn to the banquet hall, enter, lock the doors, and proceed with their program. Adolphus, the policeman who was on duty that morning, had promised to await them at the door and keep out any chance marauder. He was a married man who could be depended upon, and his wife Rosaline was even then numbered among those listening eagerly to Oliver. But speed would be necessary. They must be on their way before Rhoda could guess their intention.

Bunched closely together the married folk, scattering dignity to the winds, charged from the square. Behind them the merrymakers hooted, but the runners gave them no heed. Past the post office and Apothecary Hall they raced and around a corner into the dead end upon which the banquet hall fronted.

Yes, there was Adolphus, standing at ease in the

doorway—good Adolphus, the married, the impregnable. Only, between him and the mob which hurled itself precipitately around the corner there lay, sat, or squatted upon their hams a hundred or more countryfolk, with their swarming children and practically the entire escort of mongrel dogs that had marched with them to town.

Under the direct rays of the noon sun it was hot beyond belief, but they did not seem to mind, and theirs were the rapt faces of people who have escaped from physical discomfort into delirious dreams of blessings to come. Only the dogs seemed to be in an irritable mood. And at the sudden inrush several had to be called sharply to heel.

Completely baffled by this passive but effective barrier of humanity, Oliver and his followers drew together on the opposite side of the street. Beyond them the street ended in a breakwater, and this, with the warehouses which lifted their walls from both of its ends, framed a charming picture of blue water, a rocky islet, and a sailboat. The place was a perfect cul-de-sac, and presently into this marched the hordes of the unmarried, preceded by their battle flag and the band. But what a band

it was! During the time spent in the square the scratchies and the brasses had begun by making cautious overtures to each other. This had led to fraternizing, and had ended in the consummation of an unholy and uproarious union, the bastard results of which, now hurled back and forth in the narrow walled space, struck the victims with the stupefying effect of a physical blow.

The crowd that jammed the entrance parted and Rhoda, still looking cool and fresh in her starched linen, crossed the street, stepped between the bodies of her recumbent followers, and proceeded to parley with Adolphus.

This was the crucial moment. Here stood the law. If Adolphus held fast, the ultimate victory would rest with Oliver. He would have been merely annoyed, not beaten, by Rhoda, for sooner or later her people would have to leave; then the married folk would take possession.

From the door the man upon whom everything depended watched her coming. He was a fleshy individual of good height and middle life. He had an habitually dull eye, an amiably weak mouth and chin, and the general air of chronic dejection

of those who since infancy have expected nothing of life and, expecting nothing, have not been disappointed.

For perhaps two minutes Rhoda stood talking to him, her words lost in the uproar of the band, and during this time he stood, not meeting her eyes, one hand gripped about the handle of his club, the other fiddling nervously with his belt. Among the watchers the tension grew. One by one the musicians lowered their instruments and the gradual ebbing of the noise seemed to drain away the very air and leave them all hanging in a superheated vacuum.

Then Rhoda changed her tactics. She had been standing with one large, shapely hand braced against the glaring white of the warehouse wall. Now it left its place, and as she leaned forward the better to make herself understood, it fell with the casualness of pure accident on his shoulder and gently drew him toward her. They were about of a height, and so it was quite natural that this should bring her lips in contact with his ear. Behind the habitual dullness of his eyes a sudden gleam appeared, and Rhoda's hand materialized on the shoulder which was farthest from her and



curved softly about the collar of his smart white tunic.

There was a commotion among the married folk and Rosaline shouldered to the front. Her voice was a wail of rage and despair: "Hold fast, Adolphus! For Gawd sake hold fast—an' don't look her in the eyes!"

Rhoda bent nearer, the rabbit ears of her headkerchief wagged coquettishly before his fixed gaze. Then she drew him to her, brought the noble curve of a breast in contact with his chest, put her lips to his ear, and again she whispered.

"Don't look at her, Adolphus! Don't look at her! Shut your eyes!" shrilled the distraught wife.

Some instinctive reflex accomplished that before which his will had gone down in defeat, and his eyelids fell.

But the wisdom of this advice was open to immediate question, for Rhoda's hand promptly disappeared, fell to the latch behind Adolphus' back, and slowly pushed open the door.

A babel of warnings from the married folk filled the air, but Adolphus stood like one in a trance, swaying slightly, as Rhoda released him, and keeping his eyes tightly closed.



For a moment Rhoda disappeared inside the room, and then she returned and took Adolphus by the arm. He opened his eyes and regarded her with a glassy stare, then turned and followed her with the air of a hypnotic subject into the hall.

Then Rhoda was back alone. For a moment she stood smiling at them; then she raised her voice in the only speech of the day.

“Looks like there’s enough good things inside dis door to stall everybody on St. Croix,” she announced, “and everybody’s welcome. We’s goin’ have eatin’, dancin’, an’ music, an’ they’s free for all. An’ dat includes married people as well as single. We don’t set ourselves up to be better than nobody, and nobody ain’t too bad for us to ’sociate with. Now come pleasure yo’self.” With a sweeping gesture of invitation she turned and entered the hall, and her followers crowded in after her. But now Oliver had disappeared altogether, and without a leader the champions of respectability seemed at a loss to know what to do. But presently they gathered up what remained of their dignity and departed. Among the first to leave was Rosaline, the wife of Adolphus. There was no indecision noticeable in her manner. She knew exactly

what she was going to do. She was going to prepare for Adolphus' homecoming.

That night it was Adam and Treasure who took three tired little boys back to Martha's Haven, and they cared for them until twelve o'clock the following day when their mother returned from town.

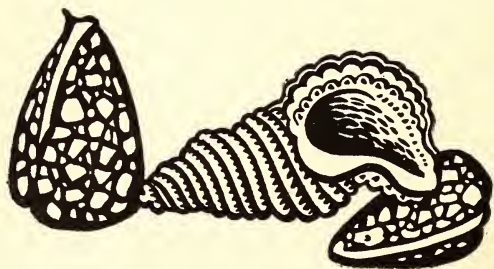
For Rhoda was a woman of her word.

And in Christiansted, as the sun crossed the meridian, the policeman, Adolphus, pushed open his front gate and entered. And anyone could have seen that there was a new spirit in him, for he trod the earth like a god.

And when his wife, Rosaline, opened her mouth in the first shrill scream of recrimination he slapped her magnificently. And her false teeth flew out, and he kicked them under the bed. Then washing himself carefully, he donned a brand-new uniform and marched downtown.

And, as the town clock launched twelve heavy strokes upon the silence, Oliver and the Widow Hester, surrounded by bags and baggage estab-

lished themselves upon the deck of a schooner bound for St. Thomas. Then as the gangplank was hauled ashore the departing traveler addressed himself loudly, but with little conviction, to the two dock hands, and proclaimed that he was proceeding to the metropolis where Noodeal had need of his services in a broader field.



PART SIX





THE BLAZE of the flamboyants flickered out and died, and the long leafy switches of the oleander curved like rockets and exploded into sprays of color in all the gardens. Then in a rush came the bougainvillea for its long blooming, and the islanders knew that summer had passed and soon the 25th of October would arrive, when they would fill the churches to offer thanks for the divine protection which had brought them safe through the hurricane season.

Unlike Supplication Day, this festival was a distinguished success, and the rejoicing, once launched, carried forward of its own momentum far into the night. The rains came, gentle yet frequent, and between these the blazing sun conjured life upward from the steaming earth. It was a good year for the mango and the banana, and every-

where the lordly coconut palm matured its fruit, filled it with nectar, encased it in fibrous armor, and dropped it at the feet of the thirsty. Man, not to be outdone by nature in this prodigal display of generosity, continued to send into the island's two ports blunt-nosed steamers which discharged upon the wharves cargoes of food and clothing for free distribution.

And now the Crucians, to whom abundance had become a commonplace, turned as only a well-fed people can to science and the fine art of living, demonstrating thereby their adaptability and the speed with which they had assimilated the culture of their new fatherland. In sequestered nooks convenient to their residences, those with a predilection for chemistry conducted fruitful experiments with the juice of the cane, the grape, and the pineapple. Bay rum, which was still manufactured on the island in restricted quantities, entered upon a phase of home consumption that cut seriously into the export business. For it was a readily demonstrable fact that the native product, if introduced into the system by way of the mouth, produced phenomena which were in the main pleasurable, and which had never occurred when the tradi-



tional method of anointing had been employed. In many of the cabins now the fungee pot had passed from the charcoal stove to a dark corner where, squatting among its stench, it belched sourly from its fermenting interior. And from the tin cans which the steamers fetched them the natives fed themselves after the manner of a civilized people, varying the monotony of Chicago meat and Boston beans with the fruits which fell upon them and rotted under their feet.

Adam, with too much time on his hands, and nothing in particular to do with it, gave himself wholeheartedly to experimentation—and to him must be accredited the most important of the island's discoveries. A coconut, he found, held hitherto unguessed possibilities. One had only to pour through one of its eyes a small quantity of sugar and a few grains of corn, or a little meal, plug up the hole, and bury the nut for a fortnight. Then, upon the exhumation, in spite of a white man's law, God would again have performed, with his own humble assistance, a miracle. The water would have been turned into wine. And wine of no ordinary potency, as he was to discover.

Adam had located his laboratory in his hilltop

tower, and there, having pilfered Rhoda's supply of corn meal and sugar, he proceeded to remain in seclusion during long and mysterious absences.

Rhoda was naturally curious as to what was taking place, but when he descended his hill at irregular intervals for his meals she would not give him the satisfaction of asking questions. She knew that he resented her own extreme reticence, and suspected that he was deliberately building up a mystery to tantalize her. But one evening after twenty-four hours had passed since he had emerged from his seclusion, she strode up the hill, appeared before the gaping doorway, and looked within. In the center of the lofty circular room she saw Adam lying flat on his back. His eyes were closed and the place was loud with his stertorous breathing, and with the buzzing of bee swarms which had descended from their hives to circle and crawl about him. Believing him to be ill, she ran forward, knelt beside him, and shook him, at first gently, then violently. He opened heavy-lidded eyes, and regarded her vacantly, then his gaze focused itself upon a coconut that lay beside him, from which the top had been slashed with the single clean stroke of a machete. He lifted the nut

to his mouth, drank deeply, sighed, and plunged again into oblivion. It dawned on Rhoda then that he was drunk. This did not alarm her, as Adam had never been a drinking man, and for a time she sat regarding him curiously and brushing away the bees that crawled and buzzed about them. She noticed a sour, cloying smell in the air, and was struck by the litter of nuts lying about, some with their noses sliced off and drained of milk, and others not yet opened. She picked one up, grasped the machete that was lying near, and with the beautiful precision of which every West Indian child is master chopped the nose cleanly off, and lifted the nut to her mouth. The milk was exquisitely sharp upon her tongue, and cool from its long burial. When she removed it to breathe, it bubbled in its fibrous cup, exhaled a heady breath, and popped tiny drops of moisture up into her face. She drank again, and the bite and coolness of it flowed deliciously through her hot and tired body and set a soft bubbly rhythm going in her brain. She noticed, but with complete detachment, that the patch of sunlight which had lain on the recumbent form of the man when she had entered had climbed to the wall opposite her

and was the color of blood. It became a purple band growing narrower momentarily. Across it the bees rocketed upward to their hives, filling the tower with a soft zooming. It went blank, and overhead the roofless walls of the tower snared a circle of early stars. It was all beautiful and strange, and about her was a quiet singularly deep and penetrating. It found the place that was raw and quivering from Crystal's going, flowed into it and stopped the pain. It slowed down the drive in her that kept her always hunting for she knew not what, moving from one thing to another like an aimless fool—trying to puzzle out answers to questions that were of themselves elusive and formless.

Her gaze fell upon the man beside her, and she bent over him and gazed long into the defenseless sleeping face, then with the flat of her hand she cleared his forehead of sweat. The hand wandered down and came to rest on the broad arch of his chest, and lay there rising and falling with his breathing. She cried a little, the tears coursing down her face, which was immobile and drained of all expression. This was followed by a dry painful sobbing, and finally silence. After a while she picked up a nut, and for a moment sat weighing it

in her hand. Then with swift decisiveness she seized the heavy knife, brought it singing down, and lifted the drink to her mouth. She did not remove it until she had drained the shell; then with an explosive burst of power she hurled it across the room and against the wall. It gave off a hollow boom like a single note upon a tom-tom, and fell. She sat on for a long time watching the sleeping man, her body alternately braced and relaxed as she combated the coma that assaulted her in reflux waves, her brow furrowed from the intensity of her effort to think. At last her face cleared. She shook her head in emphatic negation, got unsteadily to her feet, and out under the stars. Then against the outer wall of the tower she settled slowly, first sitting, then sprawling in complete abandon, her limbs conforming without conscious direction to the irregularities of the ground.

Later, when the stars grew brighter, she might have been seen quite distinctly had anyone passed that way, lying oblivious in the fatal dew-damp, with her head uncovered and with the thin stuff of her dress molded wetly over the long muscular legs, the shadowed cavity of her belly, the firm

swell of the breasts, and with her face lost fathoms deep in sleep. Deep quiet lay over Martha's Haven.

Overhead the constellations wheeled in slow procession, pulling at length over the eastern hills the half-empty shell of the last full moon. Down at Rhoda's cabin the door opened cautiously and Treasure came out under the night sky. She was wearing a white nightgown that fell in straight lines from her shoulders to her feet, and an old palm hat of her mother's which threw her face into such deep shadow that between the two tones of gown and hat there seemed to be nothing but night, dark and inscrutable. She stood immovable for a long interval. Then, lifting her gown above the weeds that bordered the narrow path, she ran swiftly past the bananas and the neglected vegetable garden, to where a small patch of cane lay level as a pool between two gentle hills. Arriving there she paused a moment, looked fearfully about her in the faint light, then parted the low solid wall of green and disappeared. In the cabin there sounded a sleepy cry that sharpened to fright, then fell through a drowsy diminuendo back into silence.



Now, time slid by pleasantly at Martha's Haven—there were no calendars, no clocks. There was no season of famine and none need take thought for the morrow. Each mature coconut tree let fall in its year's cycle a hundred nuts as large as a man's head and filled with milk. They made drifting easy now, and they demonstrated the futile waste of all human effort. Siestas, they proved, could be protracted to incredible lengths. That obscure inner compulsion toward labor for its own sake which had bedeviled Rhoda during the early days of Noodeal's domination did not worry her now. And if there were days when the house went uncleaned, and the children unwashed, and nights when Treasure was away on long, unexplained absences—well, that didn't matter very much either. And the fever of being hale and a man, and the fierce wanting that it kept burning in Adam that would have none other than Rhoda by whom he was denied, cooled by imperceptible degrees, until, even sitting close beside her, his thoughts could drift idly away, and his heartbeats lengthen quietly as drowsiness welled him and he fell asleep. And they both, when they thought at all, said to themselves that old age had



found them and stopped them from caring, and that, further, there was much to be said for it. It was a good thing to doze lightly by day, and at night to sit for a while feeling the night-cool on unaccountably flushed cheeks and brow, and listen to Adam plucking aimless chords on his guitar, and occasionally essaying a ballad in which the verses became confused and the air eventually wandered off into another tune.

There was, of course, the weekly trip to town for supplies, and this Adam and Rhoda made together, trudging slackly along under the torrid sun, sweating more profusely than was their wont, and not noticing particularly whether it was the flamboyant or the bougainvillea that bloomed along the way.

But one day as they were making their way home they came upon a group of people at the town's edge, and, faced with the necessity of pushing their way through, they paused and looked about them. They found that they were before the gates of an old sugar central, and distillery, which had been closed and had been given over to dense growths of acacia and tibet during its long desuetude. But now within the space of a single week,

and with a completeness attributable only to the magic of Noodeal, the place had been transformed. A prodigious hammering and sawing was going on within the walls. Gangs of men chopped away at the scrub, hauled it off into the open, and put fire to it. From the lofty stack a great spiral of smoke arose, hung momentarily, then was snatched by the wind and sent rolling away across the island.

Behind the gaping crowd a voice of authority shouted:

"Stand aside there. If you want work, go inside and get it. If you don't, get along and stop blocking the road."

Adam turned and saw Adolphus, very impressive in sergeant's chevrons, advancing with the manner of one who was born to command, and behind him the flaring horns and swaying flanks of a yoke of oxen straining forward under a great cartload of cane. The crowd scattered, and the beasts halted before the unloading platform of the central. Time was when Adam had driven a cane cart. He had known intimately the great red oxen with whom he had shared a common labor and to whom he transmitted thought in a common idiom.

Now with a slight tingling sensation along his spine he watched the performance, his eye alert for faulty technique. The driver grunted. The great beasts swayed, moving their weight with ponderous deliberation through a series of postures that seemed to bear no relation either to each other or to their towering load, but which miraculously swung the heavy cart around with its tailboard against the platform.

"Ain't they beautiful, Adam?" whispered Rhoda. Then in a vertical plunge from the aesthetics added, "An' I bets they makes plenty good manure too."

"Ain't nothin' like oxen," Adam said wistfully. "Can't hurry dem, can't slow dem. But when you got to have it they gives it to you."

The tailboard was jerked loose and a cataract of purple stalks poured out over the platform, breaking the spell.

"What's all dis, anyway?" Adam asked of a bystander.

"You ain't heard de news?" the man enquired. Adam shook his head.

"Noodeal done repeal de eighteenth command-

ment. Liquor ain't a sin no more, an' he say, 'Thou shalt make rum.' "

"Great Lawd!" exclaimed Rhoda. "You don't tell me. Las' week it been sin an' dis week it ain't?"

"Dat's right," the man affirmed. "Only it's dis way. He can make it an' dat's all right, an' you can buy it from Him. Only if you make it yo'self—dat's sin, an' He put you in jail."

Adam stood regarding this informed city dweller respectfully for a moment, then he asked tentatively, "How 'bout de coconut?"

Perceiving that he was in converse with field laborers, the man became definitely superior. "I ain't know nothin' about dem country habit," he disclaimed. "I's talkin' about liquor." And he presented them with a shirt-sleeved, but consciously urban back.

It did not take the island long to awaken to this new change in its political economy. Out into the country by underground from informed city sources came rumors that the land was going back into cane. That wealth would flow back, and not a

niggardly distribution of life's bare necessities, but actual cash to be spent as pleased one's fancy. Furthermore, it was affirmed that there need be no more singing and dancing about it, which pleased the people greatly, for the surfeit of high good nature was beginning to affect the stomachs of the squeamish, and there were complaints that some of the merriest abroad were beginning to develop into wife and child beaters at home. And into the untutored native mind there had come the beginnings of comprehension of the inexorable law of cause and effect.

Dramatically a new race of men appeared on the island. At first they were observed singly or in pairs, then suddenly they seemed to be everywhere. These new arrivals were not in the least like the very white young men whom Noodeal had brought at first to smile charmingly and ask amusing questions. They were for the most part hard and brown with firm, humorous mouths, and they wore with a negligent disregard of the conventions very little besides a pair of breeches, and those of khaki or blue denim. At first they wandered about looking lost, not from a lack of adaptability for there was upon them all the mark

of the rover, but they conveyed a curious sense through the strained quality of their idling that they awaited some thing or quality which when it arrived would complement them, make them whole, and start them functioning.

A ship docked at Christiansted, and as by a common instinct they drew together on the water front and disappeared among the yards and warehouses adjacent to the dock. A furious banging ensued, and then they emerged, no longer lost, but integral parts of gigantic road machines, thundering tractors, and enormous, complicated units of farm machinery. Hands gripping wheels and levers, bodies swaying in unconscious unison with the machines with which indeed their very identities had now become one, they went thundering and clanking across the island while adults gaped open-mouthed and children dove headlong into the bush.

But it was not Noodeal's way to sustain a mood to the point of boredom, and the people were not surprised when he turned from this frightening demonstration of power to a whimsey of the highest order. When placards appeared offering work to all able-bodied unemployed upon roads, cane



fields, and various urban projects, they were quick to appreciate the humor inherent in the idea that a man with a full belly would voluntarily apply for work. True, there were some of the oldsters who remembered back to a time when there was singing in the fields, and a man was no man at all who could not walk away with a hundredweight of cane on his crown. When there were good years and bad, and rest was a heaven for tired muscles, and not an overworked device for passing time. But that had all been years ago, and their timid suggestions that there might be some sense in it after all only brought ridicule down upon their heads.

Saturday came around again, and gathering up their baskets, grumbling the while at the long hot walk to the relief station, they converged upon town.

But their God had turned from them. They had been thrown out of the Garden of Eden. And a cherubim in the person of the ubiquitous Adolphus was stationed at the gate. When they questioned him as to the meaning of the locked portal, he pointed to a notice, which instead of bread offered them sterile phrases to the effect that direct



relief had been withdrawn except for the physically unfit and the aged. Labor at living wages, it was added, would be provided for all who cared to apply. Gradually it was borne in upon them that Noodeal, the lighthearted, the generous, was having the audacity to suggest that they earn their living in the sweat of their brows. Mutterings took on an ominous note, and Adolphus disappeared for a moment to return with a gentleman who did not look at all like the worshipful presence. He was slender and well muscled, and there was a stern set to his jaw. He told them quietly that the emergency was over. That they were entering upon a new day in the islands, when there would be work for all. He gave them directions as to where to apply, and then without smiling once, without a request for a single song, without even a genial wave of the hand, he left them standing in the heat outside the depot, stepped into his car and disappeared in a cloud of dust. Slowly the mutterings grew to a roar. The outer circle of malcontents surged forward against those closer in, and these in turn flattened Adolphus against the stout oaken panels of the door. For a recessive moment his face could be seen sinking back into the

weak and frightened visage of an earlier Adolphus, then it went down slowly like that of a drowning man. A stone hurtled through a window directly over the door. The sharp *ping* and the shower of splinters on the heads of the involuntary aggressors frightened them, and they started an eccentric wave of pressure. On the doorstep Adolphus appeared again, rising with his back to the door and making instinctive thrusting motions against air with his hands. There was a commotion in the crowd and several native policemen, with the police chief at their head, came shouldering through and ranged themselves before the door.

The chief was an island man, an estate owner, as his father had been before him. He stood looking into the faces of the mob, letting his scrutiny rest on each penetratingly for a space, then sliding on to the next, and each as it passed fell and hung shamefacedly. After a silence thus employed that lasted for perhaps two minutes, he said on a note of inconsequential irritation, "Now stop being goddam fools. Get along and attend to your business."

But they went sullenly. And that was new. They

no longer paid the white man the tribute of a pretense at lighthearted and docile acceptance.

Rhoda had not yet started for town when the vanguard of the malcontents reached Martha's Haven. She heard angry voices on the trail that passed near her cabin, and descended the hill to see what the commotion was about. Along the trail tramped a dozen or more villagers, some were gesticulating threateningly, while others preserved a sullen silence.

She stood, arms akimbo, blocking the path, and as they came up they formed a small group about her. "Well," she said, "sounds like a mongoose done got loose in de hen house. What's all de cacklin' about dis time?"

A woman waved an empty basket at her. "Dey's fixin' to starve we to death," she shrilled.

"Noodeal done gone back home," a man said angrily. "De new boss say everybody got to go to work. An' dey's shut up de supply station."

Two young bucks crowded forward and started talking at the same time. They were so excited that what they said made little sense, but their in-

tention, transmitted by gestures and snatches of talk, was plain enough. They were going back to town after dark, gathering a mob as they traveled, and break into the warehouse. Then they would take what they wanted. Rhoda broke in on the harangue:

"Let me get dis straight," she said. "De new boss got work to give you?"

They admitted that he had.

"An' he say he'll pay you wages for workin'?"

"Yeah," said one, "he say dat. But we ain't got to work no more. Ain't we's Americans?"

For a moment she stood looking from face to face, and then she started to laugh. They stood around gaping at her, thinking that this misfortune had upset her mind, and wondering what to do about it.

When she could control her voice, she exclaimed, "O Lawd, keep me from laughing too hard at dese people." Then addressing herself directly to them she continued, "Old Noodeal sure make a parcel of fools out of you. I bet he's kickin' up he heels in Washington now, telling de president how dere's a bunch of crazy niggers down in St. Croix think as how dey's got to be babied for

de rest of dere lives. I bet he's listenin' now, an' every time he hears you makin' a fuss about havin' to work for a livin' he laughs all de harder." The laughter left her face, and her voice took on a cutting edge. "But I'll tell you one thing. He ain't goin' to make a fool out o' me. I ain't asked him for no favors yet, an' I ain't goin' to. An' if de new boss thinks he's goin' to scare me with hard labor, all I got to tell him is: Lead it out."

She reached out and took one of the potential revolutionists by the arm and shook him none too gently. "Tell me," she demanded, "you is Rebecca's boy, ain't you?"

He nodded a rebellious assent, pulling away from her and trying to disengage himself from her grasp.

"An' you think she's goin' to thank you for gettin' yo' head broke by de police, while she has to keep on sweatin' herself to death to live?" She gave him a final shake, spun him about facing the village and flung him from her down the path.

"Git home now an' soak yo' head," she shouted after him. "An' Monday morning hoof it to town an' get yourself a job."

They all stood watching the youth scurrying

away from her in the direction of home. One started laughing, then another and another. Rhoda smiled broadly. "I's talkin' truth, ain't it?" she asked, then when they nodded assent, she went on, "An' don't tell me about starvin'. Ain't one of you but got something put by at home, dat will keep you till yo' heads clear enough to think straight. Now go home an' think it over. Dat's all. None of you ain't fools."

She turned and strode off in the direction of her cabin, but when she passed the vegetable garden she stopped and, with hands on hips, stood regarding it. Weeds had well-nigh obliterated the furrows. Beneath a tangle of neglected tomato vines fallen fruit lay and rotted under the midday sun. Only the sunflowers had withstood the invasion, and their round stupid faces stared at her reproachfully across the rank growth of weeds. Grimly she tucked her skirt up, pulling it through her belt until her legs were bare to the knees, then she seized a rusty hoe from the fence corner and set to work chopping savagely at the waist-high weeds. Sweat poured from her, and the growth stood up to her strokes and seemed to fight back. Never had she felt the sun lay such a weight upon



her. Its pressure became unendurable, bending her over, while her heart pounded and her lungs gasped painfully for breath. But she gritted her teeth and fought on until a touch of vertigo sent her against the sagging fence for support.

When her head cleared and she looked about her she saw that she had cleared a space no longer than her hoe handle. She could scarcely believe that, and when the full realization of it came home to her she was frightened. She knew then what she desperately needed, and shouldering her hoe she headed up the hill for Adam's tower.

He was asleep, and she set upon him with violence, kicking and tugging at him until he staggered to his feet. Then she thrust his shovel into his hand and drove him before her around to the north side of the tower where in the deep shade the earth lay in little mounds raw from a fresh turning.

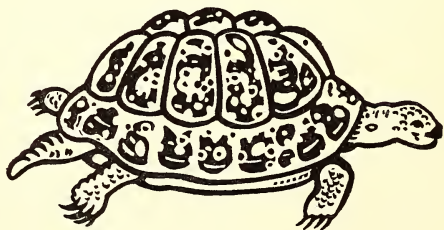
He understood what she wanted and set to digging. Presently an earth-stained coconut was uncovered and he kicked it toward her.

But she did not pick it up. The sight of it lying there seemed in some strange way to work a change in her. Her face hardened with determination,



then she swung the heavy hoe above her head and brought it down. The nut flew apart and the contents spilled on the ground. Then it seemed as though a frenzy seized her. Adam, still half stupefied, responded dumbly to her orders and kept turning up nut after nut, and, as each was exhumed, the hoe sang downward and the liquor spurted. When the last one was split open, she reached out and took the shovel from his unresisting grasp, took him by the arm and steered him around to the door.

"All right," she announced, "we's done with dat. Get in dere an' sleep it off. Tomorrow morning we's startin' over again. We's goin' to work."



The next morning was fair, with a fresh sea wind blowing and a surf piling up on the reefs below that could be heard distinctly from the

tower. With a head clearer and perception sharper than they had been for months, Adam stepped from his door, surveyed the day appreciatively, drew it deeply into his lungs, and set off toward the cabin and breakfast.

His mind was engaged with the mystery of Rhoda's behavior the previous afternoon. She had left him immediately after her destructive raid, but he felt sure that there was something behind it that would have a direct bearing on his future. He was eager to see and question her.

He entered the cabin, hung his hat upon its peg, turned around and received a distinct shock. There was another occupant. Adam stood staring at the young man who was seated at the table between Treasure and Hoover, his mind snapping back to his first entrance, after his return to the island, when he had walked in and found Oliver and Patrick in possession. The shock made him forget his manners, and instead of greeting the guest he turned to Rhoda a face of apprehensive interrogation.

As on that earlier distressing occasion, she was at the stove with her back to the room. But she turned, picked him up with the corner of her eye,

and indicating the visitor with a wave of her kitchen fork announced:

"Dat's Treasure's young man, David Woolsey."

She broke an egg into the skillet, and the hot fat sang out. Then she reached a plate down from a shelf, and remarked casually:

"She bring him in from de cane patch dis mornin'."

Adam's face cleared and he turned to see what his daughter had found in the cane. The young man grinned engagingly, wiped his mouth elaborately with a bandanna handkerchief, and lifted himself to a height of well over six feet.

Then he came forward, extending a large calloused hand.

"I's glad to meet you," Adam said, "and I hopes you an' Treasure gets along well together."

"Thank you, Mr. Work," he replied without embarrassment, "I think we suits each other, and so does she."

Adam looked him up and down. He was wearing a clean blue shirt and work pants, and Adam could see that there wasn't a slack muscle on him.

"You look like you ain't afraid of hard labor," he observed.

There was a flash of white teeth against mahogany-dark skin. "I eats it," he laughed. "I eats it and hollers for more."

Adam turned and looked at Treasure. She was deliberately keeping her eyes from meeting his, and he knew that she had ceased to be a child. That she had found her man and given herself to him, and that it had been between them just as it had between Rhoda and himself in the cane so many years ago. But he hoped that it would be different with her. That she and this man would find their happiness and hold it.

Treasure busied herself with the children, deliberately avoiding the men, and while Adam's gaze rested on her she drew one of the boys to her in a gesture so tender, so instinct with maternal solicitude, that he felt it in himself warm and glowing, but sharp, too, as pain. His voice shook slightly as he said:

"Rhoda's raised you a fine gal, she's strong and she's warmhearted. You'll get happiness for a long time if you stick together."

David laughed aloud. "You needn't think I's takin' any chances losin' her. I's plannin' to get married—soon as she'll let me—next week maybe."

Treasure cast an apprehensive glance at her mother and got to her feet, and her man stepped quickly to her side, and throwing an arm across her shoulders, drew her to him.

Rhoda crossed the room and faced them.

"Young man," she said, "must be you don't know my face or you wouldn't come here talkin' marriage. I's dat same Rhoda what had de parade of de unmarried."

He met her look unflinchingly. "I knows you, and what's more I's proud to know you," he answered. "My ma and pa was marchin' right behind you. Dey is de Woolseys from Adventure estate. Unmarried is right if you believes in it, and it's good for you and ma, but we is growing up in a new island, and if we want to get along we got to start out living the way they say."

Rhoda was immediately sensible of the distinction between his attitude and that of Oliver's followers. There was no censure here, no implication of a moral inferiority. She could even admit to herself the wisdom of conforming if a young couple wanted to get along in the world. But she felt compelled to recite an article of her faith.

"A woman's a fool to sell herself out to a man,"

she affirmed. "Marriage is a halter. An' once he gets dat buckled on good he can lay on de whip, and she got to take it. Even if she got de spirit to rear and bolt he can catch her and bring her back."

She had been looking at Treasure while she made her speech. Now she shifted her gaze back to the man, and she saw that his mouth had widened into an infectious grin. She hardened herself to the temptation of responding, and said, "Dat's de truth I's tellin' you."

His grin broadened. "Sure it is," he agreed, "only don't forget it's a double harness, and the gal got hold of the lines too. Maybe that would make the man think twice before he tried boltin'." He turned and looked pointedly at Adam, and then back at her, and his implication was too obvious for her to miss.

Of course, Treasure had told him everything. Rhoda was silenced for the moment. Then a smell of burning food gave her an escape into action, and she hurried to the stove.

During breakfast Rhoda watched David closely. She could see that he was new style, but not like Crystal and her young friends who aped white people in their clothes and talk and who expected



to get everything and give nothing in return. He still talked and acted like a Crucian, but he showed his schooling in the sureness with which he went about everything, and in the straight way he thought and put his thoughts into words. He was eager to tell them about himself, to reassure them for Treasure's future, and get that over with. He showed by his manner that he respected them and that he assumed in them an intelligent understanding of his own aims and ambitions, which was of itself flattering. Only once did he sound boastful, and that was when he told them that he had never gone on relief.

Rhoda's heart warmed to him. "You ain't never take nothin' from Noodeal's hand?" she asked him. "You ain't never sung nor danced?"

He laughed aloud. "My singin' ain't good for anything but to stampede cattle," he told her, "and when I so far forgets myself as to cut loose and dance, it ain't for nobody's pleasure but David Woolsey, an' I usually needs a ten-acre field for it, so as not to break up everything."

He told them that he had gone to work for Mr. Lyndall as gardener and yard boy when the ad-



ministrator first came to the island. Then added on a note of pride:

"Then when they opened up Calabash Hill estate for homesteaders, I was nigh about the first to take up land. I got my own twelve acres now and the builders will give me my house next week."

"You mean you workin' in cane?" Rhoda asked enviously.

"Sure," he replied. "My people ain't never been in anything but cane, I don't know nothin' else; turn me loose in cane and I'm living, lock me up in town an' you got me to bury—that's all."

Rhoda was sitting opposite him with the narrow table between them. Now, without moving her eyes from his face, she leaned forward. "When de weather's right," she began, "and you's feelin' fine, tell me how much cane can you chop in a day?"

He leaned toward her, and the other occupants of the room seemed to be excluded from their sphere of being. They were tranced devotees at their rites. "I've gone right through a quarter acre singlehanded," he replied. "And a hundred pounds is easy for me to tote out at a time."

"Me too," she said softly. "When I was in my prime I could chop my quarter acre good as any man, an' I believe if I had de chance I could do it again." For a moment her eyes looked through him, across an Elysian field of serried cane bending in the trade wind, and beneath the shoulder of her loose frock a muscle twitched rhythmically as though the arm swung a machete. Then she came back to the room with a sigh.

"De young is lucky," she said. "It so easy for dem to get what dey want. Keepin' it's de hard thing in life, an' old folks ain't got de wits to do dat."

He laughed at her for pretending that she was an old woman. Why, he was twenty-five, he told her, and he'd bet her that she wasn't more than ten or twelve years older. Then he became serious.

"Look here," he exclaimed, "I've got an idea. Why don't you two take up a homestead yourselves? Mr. Lyndall is going to open up Adventure estate near here next week. I'll talk to him about you. You can take up six acres first year, and then if he sees that you mean business he'll let you have six more, and you can get a house put up—"

She thought a minute, then she dismissed the

idea. "No, it's too much. It ain't no use to try. De landlord would own me before I get started. Mr. Fred use to charge me only six dollars an acre rent, and I just could manage to scratch through. Now, with workin' for a new boss, he'd charge more. I couldn't take a chance."

"Listen," David said, "you ain't got de idea of homesteadin' at all. You don't work for anybody else. It's your land. The government sells it to you on time."

Rhoda cut in: "There you go, talkin' about buyin' an' sellin'. You know I ain't got any money to buy land."

Patiently David went about his task of making her understand.

"You say," he began, "that you had to pay Mr. Fred six dollars an acre a year rent—"

With her absorbed gaze fixed on his face, she nodded assent.

"Well, the government bought up the estates cheap, and cut them up for the people. All you have to pay is three dollars a year an acre. They clear it for you, plow it for you. And when you cut your crop they sell it for you, and give you the profit on it. If you are honest and ain't afraid of

work, the second year they put you up a house. After twenty years goes by, you stop payin' anything at all. The land belongs to you and your children, clear and free." He paused for a moment, searching for a graphic illustration that would make it plain to her. "Just like Martha's Haven used to belong to old Mr. Ainman and now it belongs to Mr. Fred and nobody can't take it from him," he concluded.

Rhoda sat silent, with her eyes searching his face. After a while she moistened her lips with her tongue, and asked on a note that was almost one of pleading, "You wouldn't fool me about a thing like dat, would you? I couldn't stand to be fooled about dat."

"You been by the central lately? The big central between here and town?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered. "An' I seen de oxcarts movin' again, an' de cane spillin' out on de platform."

"Well," he said, "like as not that very cane was homesteader's crop. There's more than two hundred of us already and the first crop's being cut now."

"If dat's so," Rhoda said, "you could take me dere an' I could see it."

David got to his feet, and his hearty laughter filled the cabin. "You're worse than Treasure," he told her. "She ain't seen it yet, but she took my word. I was plannin' to take her over this mornin', and I'll take you too. It ain't but a five-mile walk to my patch, and seein's believin'."

Rhoda turned to Adam. "You done hear all dis talk. What you think?"

Adam said, "Yes, I hear, an' I's hear it talked about before, but I didn't believe it. Maybe you better go see."

She nodded agreement. "You stay, den, and look to de boys. We can't take dem along because I's got to travel light. No tellin' where I got to go today. I got to get to de bottom of dis homesteadin' 'cause I wouldn't sleep again till I knows for sure one way or de other."

She took the trail first, stepping so fast that the others were put to it to keep up with her, and Adam, watching from the cabin door, saw first her, then Treasure, and lastly David, clear the summit of the nearest hill, then drop from view.

The man and the two women who accompanied him came out on the edge of a large clearing and stopped.

To Rhoda the landscape had a familiar aspect, like a place seen in a dream. She recalled the flat floor of the valley, walled by its low hills; the way it was laid out in squares, some under cane, some just broken by the plow, and a few still in bush; and she remembered the little houses, square and white, with galleries across the front where people had sat and listened to her. She gazed fixedly at the scene, her brow furrowed in an effort to remember. Then her face cleared.

"It's been here," she told David. "It was when I was workin' for de parade. I remember now how de people tried to tell me about it, but I was thinkin' of nothin' but married and unmarried, an' I had no time for anything else. An' I'll tell you another thing," she went on proudly, "I got plenty of marchers out of dis same valley, homesteaders or no homesteaders."

"Sure you did," David laughed. "That ain't got anything to do with growing cane, and Mr. Lyndall knows it. He's got better sense than to try to make people over."

He directed their gaze toward a cottage a short distance away, from which workmen were engaged in removing forms, leaving clean white cement to reflect the noon sun as they proceeded. "That's my home," he announced proudly. "Mine and Treasure's."

A gasp of delight escaped the girl, and David took her by the hand. "Come," he said. "I can't wait to show you."

They traversed the short distance, crossed the narrow gallery and found themselves in a room of good size and proportions, opening in the rear into a small kitchen which in turn let upon a rear gallery. Flanking the living room was a good-sized bedroom, and built against the outer wall of the house was a commodious cistern. At a short distance to the rear of the house a cement privy proclaimed the fact that the government was not unaware of the refinements of a higher civilization.

Neither Treasure nor Rhoda spoke, but their faces were eloquent while David rattled off details of the hurricane-proof construction, let them peer through the manhole into the depths of the cistern, and finally, as a climax to the catalogue of wonders, escorted them proudly out through the weeds to



inspect the privy. It was only here that Rhoda felt a slight letdown, and she stood looking within, jutting her lower lip skeptically, feeling vaguely the introverted and inhospitable attitude implicit in the erection of a single-holer.

Later when they were viewing his stand of cane, and Rhoda was running a hand down a stout purple stalk much as a jockey might let his fingers linger on the flank of a runner, they heard the drone of an approaching car, and turning saw the machine come to a stop and Mr. Lyndall wave to them from the driver's seat.

David covered the distance at a run, with the two women self-consciously trailing after him, and finally stopping a few paces away.

The men talked earnestly for a few moments, then the administrator looked up and met Rhoda's eyes, and with his peculiarly warm and disarming smile, called, "Good morning, Rhoda. Come here and let me congratulate you. I understand you and Adam are about to be married."

She advanced, answering his smile, knowing that she was being teased, and feeling at once easy in the atmosphere of give and take that it created.

"No, sir!" she exclaimed. "I ain't marryin'

Adam or no man. Dere ain't one of 'em worth keepin'."

He laughed, then dropped his bantering manner. "I am glad we met," he said. "David tells me that he has been talking to you about homesteading. Well, what do you think of it?"

"He's been tellin' me," she answered, "but I can't believe it. Tell me yourself. Is it true dat I can take up land, an' dat I can pay for it out of the crops?"

"That is true," he replied.

"An' dat someday when I's finished payin', it will belong to my boys clear, just like Mr. Ainman owns Martha's Haven?"

Lyndall leaned over the car door and looked her gravely in the eyes.

"That's what homesteading is, Rhoda," he told her. "That's what the government wants to do for the people here, so that everyone who wants to can be his own master, so long as he is willing to work hard and keep his land."

"My God!" she said reverently. "Ain't dat wonderful. Noodeal's makin' sense at last. I can't believe it, but if you an' David say it's so, it must be."

The white man reached behind him and clicked open the door of his car. "Get in," he ordered, "all three of you. I'm going over to Adventure now. They are breaking ground there today. You can look around and pick out a six-acre tract."

They climbed in, and he slid the car from gear to gear until it rocketed away through the waves of heat that hovered above the concrete.

"Come to think of it," he said over his shoulder, "Adventure would be just the place for you. It's only a couple of miles from Martha's Haven, and you could stay on in Mr. Ainman's cabin until you had cleared a crop and rated a cottage on your land. It's a fine setup. Glad I thought of it."

Adventure was one of the oldest estates on the island. When the American colonies were still paying tribute to the British crown, its reputation extended beyond insular borders, and its vast sweep of cane tilting seaward from a low range of hills had been a sight to see. There were many tales told of the old holding, and some were false and some were true; but the most persistent and credible legend told of a lad so brilliant and precocious that at the age of fifteen the supervision of

the far-flung acres had been entrusted to him by his uncle, who controlled a number of island estates. And some of the oldest Negroes would still tell the tale as they had heard it, of how the boy (who, it was said, was a natural child, like so many of their own) would ride to the top of the highest hill and sit there gazing away across the blue water toward the American colonies; and he would vow that someday he would leave the fields and take a ship to the northwest, to see what he could see; and the name of the lad as they remembered it, and as the Negroes spoke it, was very like Alexander Hamilton.

Now as Mr. Lyndall's car surmounted the low barrier range and started downward, and the prospect unfolded before Rhoda's eyes, the story of the boy came into her mind; and in the brief moment before mounting excitement drowned every other thought she had a singularly sharp visual impression of him, sitting immobile on his horse, gazing seaward, bemused in his dream; and she wondered whether he had ever got where he wanted to go and if it had made him happier or sadder than he would have been had he kept on riding the cane on St. Croix.

Then her mind was wrenched sharply into the present, and she sat, her eyes wide and her mouth gaping stupidly at the sight that met her gaze.

Lunging toward her over the uneven ground came an enormous tractor. High on the driver's seat, among his wheels and levers, perched a man, looking small and of little consequence in comparison with the thundering behemoth that he rode. And harnessed to the rear of the monster were gangs of revolving steel disks that bit deeply into the earth, then rolled it behind them in lengthening parallel furrows.

Her whole body turned as the tractor passed, and her eyes followed the wide swath of plowed land as it unrolled from beneath the receding disks. When the tractor stopped at the end of the field she broke the silence. "It ain't take dat thing more'n ten minutes," she marveled, "an' a pair of good mules couldn't do it in a day."

"That's exactly the point," the administrator assured her. "That's how we can help you to raise your crop cheaper. Then, selling for all the homesteaders together, our co-operative company can get the best prices for the cane."

But she was not interested in the economics of

co-operative farming; for a suspicion of this machine age had popped into her mind. She asked sharply:

"You ain't got one of dem things to chop cane too, is you? An' to set canes, an' to hoe? 'Cause if you has, what goin' become of de nigger?"

Mr. Lyndall and David exchanged glances, then they both burst out laughing. "You needn't worry about that," the white man assured her. "We only get the ground ready and lay the canes for planting. You do all the rest, just like you used to."

"Dat's good," Rhoda approved emphatically. "Because de only way to get de devil out of dese people is to sweat it out. Noodeal's done tried restin' it out, an' it didn't work."

Her glance roved over the broad expanse of littoral that fell away toward the sea, then it returned to Lyndall.

"Where's *my* land?" she asked briefly.

They all got back into the car, and presently came to a tract high enough for drainage, yet sufficiently flat to hold moisture during the inevitable seasons of drought, and commanding a sweeping panorama of field and sea.

"How's this?" the administrator enquired.



Her eyes appraised it, then her face, turned quickly toward him, glowed with her approval.

"None better," she said. "Dere ain't a finer piece of cane dirt on St. Croix!"

"Good," he said. "It is yours."

He got back into his car. David and Treasure had wandered a few paces away, and the two parties to the transaction were alone. Rhoda stooped down and scraped up a handful of dirt. She reached out and rested the other on the door of the car, detaining him. He leaned forward, expecting her to speak. For a long moment she said nothing. Her large, well-made hand held the dirt, then the fingers opened and it spilt through to the ground, while she gazed fixedly down at it. Then she looked up and met his gaze, intent, half amused, and fixed on her face.

"Mr. Lyndall," she started at last, "could I—you wouldn't care if I—" Inexplicably, words left her. There were none with which she could shape her thoughts. Then she gathered her forces, and in a rush they came:

"Could I please sleep here tonight? Could I lie down an' rest *on my own land?*"



The air was surcharged with emotion. For a moment Rhoda thought that Mr. Lyndall was going to embrace her. That prescient upsurge in herself in answer to something in men had usually meant that. She hoped he wouldn't, because she knew he would be sorry afterward, and God knew she wouldn't know what to say or do: but he didn't do anything. He just sat and looked at her for a long time with a little water in his eyes. Then she felt it slackening off; and presently he said in a voice that shook a little, "Sure, you can spend the night here if you want to. It's going to be clear." He smiled, and his voice steadied. "Now that I come to think of it, it's a fine idea. The land is yours, all right, but maybe you'd better stay and watch it. Then nobody can carry it away. Tomorrow I'll come and bring you the papers. Then you'll be safe, and you can go back home."

"Yes," she answered earnestly, "dat's what I'll do. I can't take no chances. An' besides, I want to rest on my own land."

He touched the starter, then changed his mind and turned back to her. "This is a great day for me too, Rhoda," he said. "It's a great day, and I want

to thank you for it. The others have taken up land and are working hard. They'll make a good living. But it's more than that with you."

She stood gazing at him, her eagerness to understand leading him on, her inability to make sense of what he was saying baffling him.

"It's your feeling for the land itself that is starting something here. Something that can't die." She nodded eagerly, dumbly, and waited.

He began again abruptly. "I haven't any children, you know—my wife—maybe I won't be here much longer myself. This," with a wave of his hand, "is my—my immortality."

Rhoda's eyes widened, showing a hair line of white above and below the iris; and because she was utterly lost she nodded three times with profound conviction. Desperately he said, "Can't you see—all of this—you, your love for it, your children carrying on— It's like—it makes me feel as though I were having a child!"

She uttered a startled exclamation and looked a little frightened.

"Oh, my God!" he groaned. "At my age I ought to know better than to be making speeches."

Angrily he jerked his sun helmet down over a

face that showed red through its tan, and trod fiercely upon the starter. Then as the leaping car jerked a curtain of dust between him and the woman, he called over his shoulder, "Well, anyhow—good night and good luck."

When the three travelers returned to Martha's Haven, Adam had got the boys fed and into bed, and had just settled himself on the doorstep with his guitar to await their return. He was immediately conscious of a change that had taken place in Rhoda. There was in her face and manner the mood of wild gaiety that had captured him when he was a lad, and which he had never been able to resist in his earlier days with her. She was electric with vitality, and the moment she strode across the threshold she started issuing orders.

"Treasure," she called, "make up a package of lunch for me an' Adam, den get some supper ready for you an' David. You two is to sleep here tonight an' mind de boys." She spun around and confronted Adam, who stood gaping in amazement by the door.

"Go home," she ordered. "Wash yourself an' git into some clean clo'es. Den come back fast as

you can. And bring a piece of sailcloth to keep off de dew-damp. Me an' you's goin' on a journey." He stood a moment goggling at her with his mouth hanging open. She stamped her foot at him. "Don't stan' dere holdin' dat flytrap open at me. Do like I say—an' hurry. Time's passin' an' we got to get dere 'fore deep dark."

When he returned she was waiting for him. She was attired as she had been for the parade in a voluminous white dress, and her headkerchief was tied Martinique fashion, with its rabbit ears erect. She held over her arm a folded quilt, and in her hand a small paper-wrapped package.

She told him nothing on the march, but kept stepping swiftly ahead of him, and before they had gone half the distance she had him panting. They reached Adventure as the swift twilight fell; and during the last draining away of the daylight Adam, acting upon her monosyllabic instructions, hung the piece of sailcloth from saplings at the edge of the clearing and spread the quilt beneath it. While he was thus engaged, Rhoda opened her package and laid out several coarse sandwiches of corn bread and slices of canned beef.

Her mood of excited gaiety had passed, and in

the ebbing light Adam could see that her eyes had grown wide and somber and that she was wrapped deeply in her own thoughts. In silence they ate their meal, and abstractedly she gathered up the crumbs, wrapped them in the paper, and put it tidily away.

The brief moment of deepest dark that follows twilight passed, and stars began to palpitate faintly in the enormous void above them. Still they sat on, and still Rhoda said no word.

At last when the stars had possessed themselves of the night, and their faint silvery radiance lay over Adventure, and the pale palm of a Negro could be plainly seen in the dark, she heaved a sigh that expressed a profound happiness, got to her feet, and commenced slowly to undress. Adam, lying in the shadow of the sailcloth, watched her, and he saw in two separate waves the white clothing fall from her, leaving against the darkness only an amorphous shadow and above it the turban, white and poised in air. Then slowly as he strained his gaze into the night, he saw the form come to life against the stars—tall, deep-bosomed, broad in the hips for childbearing, muscled for work in the fields. She drew her body up, stretching her arms

first wide, then high, and then she came and lay down on the quilt beside Adam. After a short space, she said, "I's done with searchin' now. I's done with worryin'. Dis is our own land now. It's time for you an' me to rest still."

He felt the old irresistible pull and sweep of her in the dark beside him. It communicated itself to the earth upon which he lay, and set it rocking. It poured into his body, and for a moment he choked with the beat of it in his throat. Then the separate elements yielded themselves to the march of a universal rhythm, and he could not have said which was the woman, which the man, and which the earth that bore their weight upon its sustaining hand.

### THE END











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